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no. 140

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EDITOR : JOHN CARNELL

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1964—a dull year

It has been a custom of mine at this time each year, to give an analysis of the science fiction highlights during the previous twelve months, but looking through my sparse notes, it would seem that the year just past was one of the dullest and most uninteresting for some considerable time. Certainly, there was a great deal more s-f about than in any previous year—a barrage of monthly paperbacks, both home-grown and imported, over thirty hardcover books from various publishers, more s-f films than usual, s-f popping up in all kinds of general journals, and the beginning of the BBC's marathon TV Time-travelling series "Dr. Who," the in-between Saturday programme designed for teenagers and tottering oldsters (it will run for 52-weeks, in adventures of six- to eight-week stanzas).

Yet in all this plethora there was hardly a grain of gold, most of the material being gold-plated at best or just plain dross. Even the much-vaunted Trieste S-F Film Festival turned out to be a drab affair enlivened only by brilliant sunshine and good company. I can remember the time, not many years back, when outstanding books stuck in my mind the whole year round and I did not require notes to bring them to mind, yet, from the welter of books which flowed from the Horn of Plenty during 1963, only three novels are remembered—Jim Ballard's *The Drowned World*, brilliantly controversial from a literary viewpoint, James Gunn's *The Joymakers*, unique in its approach and Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, which hardly fits the s-f category but should be granted a place if one accepts Walter Miller Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* as s-f.

As one reader in *Postmortem* asks, this month, having already seen the same picture as myself, "What *will* emerge as the best novel of the year?" We shall have to leave this to the conventioners at this year's American World S-F Conference which will be held in San Francisco at the beginning of September—and doubtless they will have just as hard a job, alleviated by a short list of possible runners.

Several good anthologies and individual collections were published in the UK during 1963, but the genre relies mainly on new material to keep its fires burning brightly amongst the

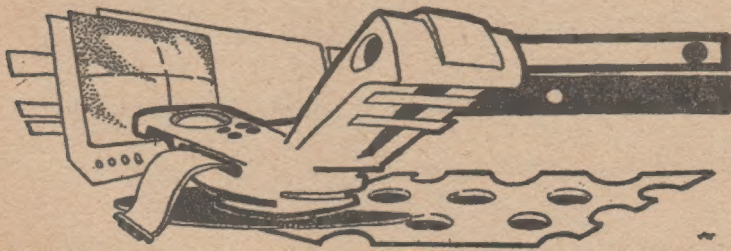
literary hierarchy. Fortunately, there are several fine novels due for publication during 1964 and I recommend that you look out for Brian Aldiss's *Greybeard* coming from Faber in the Autumn and Daniel F. Galouye's *Counterfeit World* coming soon from Gollancz.

Let me turn away from the gloom of last year and take this opportunity of thanking all our Guest Editors for some extremely interesting and controversial aspects on science fiction in general and the many readers who took up the various challenges and wrote in giving their points of agreement or disagreement. Although we were unable to publish all the letters received, I hope that those which did appear in print more than did justice to the various arguments. By and large it was a varied series of editorials, which mainly pointed up the fact that not even amongst themselves are the writers in solid agreement on most of the major issues discussed. A useful trait—at least we can expect their stories to continue as varied and different as their arguments.

Finally, my own special thanks to all those readers who took the time and trouble to reply to our Survey questionnaire in the January issue. Every one was appreciated and will help round out some sort of picture of our present reading audience. While the final statistics have not yet been completed, a snap check just before the closing date showed a large swing in readership age, the average age of the male readers being roughly 24 years as against 31 years in 1958. Query—where have all the older readers gone? Which could perhaps be answered by the rough figures taken on the number of s-f magazines and paperbacks bought each month—magazines down to one or two, paperbacks up to an average of seven per head!

It will be fun working out the final figures and these should appear next month.

john carnell



Here is another fascinating glimpse into the inner space of Ballard-land—the psychological urge of an ex-H-bomber pilot to return to the island scene of bomb experiments in which he participated ; but for what reason ?

the terminal beach

by j. g. ballard

At night, as he lay half-asleep on the floor of the ruined bunker. Traven heard the waves breaking along the shore of the lagoon, reminding him of the long Atlantic rollers on the beach at Dakar, where he had been born, and of listening in the evenings for his parents to drive home along the corniche road from the airport. Overcome by this forgotten memory, he woke uncertainly from the bed of old magazines on which he slept and hurried towards the dunes that screened the lagoon.

Through the cold night air he could see the abandoned Superfortresses lying among the palms beyond the perimeter of the emergency landing field three hundred yards away. Traven walked through the dark sand, already forgetting where the shore lay, although the atoll was little more than half a mile in width. Above him, along the crests of the dunes, the tall palms leaned into the dim air like the symbols of a cryptic alphabet. The landscape of the island was covered by strange ciphers.

Giving up the attempt to find the beach, Traven stumbled into a set of tracks left years earlier by a large caterpillar vehicle. The heat released by one of the weapons tests had fused the sand, and the double line of fossil imprints, un-

covered by the evening air, wound its serpentine way among the hollows like the footfalls of an ancient saurian.

Too weak to walk any further, Traven sat down between the tracks. Hoping that they might lead him to the beach, he began to excavate the wedge-shaped grooves from a drift into which they disappeared. He returned to the bunker shortly before dawn, and slept through the hot silences of the following noon.

The Blocks

As usual on these enervating afternoons, when not even a breath of on-shore breeze disturbed the dust, Traven sat in the shadow of one of the blocks, lost somewhere within the centre of the maze. His back resting against the rough concrete surface, he gazed with a phlegmatic eye down the surrounding aisles and at the line of doors facing him. Each afternoon he left his cell in the abandoned camera bunker among the dunes and walked down into the blocks. For the first half an hour he restricted himself to the perimeter aisle, now and then trying one of the doors with the rusty key in his pocket—he had found it among the litter of smashed bottles and cans in the isthmus of sand separating the testing ground from the air-strip—and then inevitably, with a sort of drugged stride, he set off into the centre of the blocks, breaking into a run and darting in and out of the corridors, as if trying to flush some invisible opponent from his hiding place. Soon he would be completely lost. Whatever his efforts to return to the perimeter, he always found himself once more in the centre.

Eventually he would abandon the task, and sit down in the dust, watching the shadows emerge from their crevices at the foot of the blocks. For some reason he invariably arranged to be trapped when the sun was at zenith—on Eniwetok, the thermonuclear noon.

One question in particular intrigued him: "What sort of people would inhabit this minimal concrete city?"

The Synthetic Landscape

"This island is a state of mind," Osborne, one of the scientists working in the old submarine pens, was later to remark to Traven. The truth of this became obvious to Traven within two or three weeks of his arrival. Despite the sand and the few anaemic palms, the entire landscape of

the island was synthetic, a man-made artifact with all the associations of a vast system of derelict concrete motorways. Since the moratorium on atomic tests, the island had been abandoned by the Atomic Energy Commission, and the wilderness of weapons aisles, towers and blockhouses ruled out any attempt to return it to its natural state. (There were also stronger unconscious motives, Traven reflected: if primitive man felt the need to assimilate events in the external world to his own psyche, 20th century man had reversed this process; by this Cartesian yardstick, the island at least *existed*, in a sense true of few other places).

But apart from a few scientific workers, no-one yet felt any wish to visit the former testing ground, and the naval patrol boat anchored in the lagoon had been withdrawn three years before Traven's arrival. Its ruined appearance, and the associations of the island with the period of the Cold War—what Traven had christened 'The Pre-Third'—were profoundly depressing, an Auschwitz of the soul whose mausoleums contained the mass-graves of the still undead. With the Russo-American *détente* this nightmarish chapter of history had been gladly forgotten.

The Pre-Third

The actual and potential destructiveness of the atomic bomb plays straight into the hands of the Unconscious. The most cursory study of the dream-life and fantasies of the insane shows that ideas of world-destruction are latent in the unconscious mind Nagazaki destroyed by the magic of science is the nearest man has yet approached to the realisation of dreams that even during the safe immobility of sleep are accustomed to develop into nightmares of anxiety.

Glover: 'War, Sadism and Pacifism.'

The Pre-Third: the period was characterised in Traven's mind above all by its moral and psychological inversions, by its sense of the whole of history, and in particular of the immediate future—the two decades, 1945-65—suspended from the quivering volcano's lip of World War III. Even the death of his wife and six-year-old son in a motor accident seemed only part of this immense synthesis of the historical and psychic zero, the frantic highways where each morning of his life they met their deaths on the advance causeways to the global armageddon.

Third Beach

He had come ashore at midnight, after a hazardous search for an opening in the reef. The small motor-boat he had hired from an Australian pearl-diver at Charlotte Island subsided into the shallows, its hull torn by the sharp coral. Exhausted, Traven walked through the darkness among the dunes, where the dim outlines of bunkers and concrete towers loomed between the palms.

He woke the next morning into bright sunlight and found himself lying half-way down the slope of a wide concrete beach. This ringed an empty reservoir or target basin some two hundred feet in diameter, part of a system of artificial lakes built down the centre of the atoll. Leaves and dust choked the exit grilles, and a pool of warm water two feet deep lay below him, reflecting a distant line of palms.

Traven sat up and took stock of himself. This brief inventory, which merely confirmed his physical identity, was limited to little more than his thin body in its frayed cotton garments. In the context of the surrounding terrain, however, even this collection of tatters seemed to possess a unique vitality. The desolation and emptiness of the island, and the absence of any local fauna, were emphasised by the huge sculptural forms of the target basins let into its surface. Separated from each other by narrow isthmuses, the lakes stretched away along the curve of the atoll.

On either side, sometimes shaded by the few palms that had gained a precarious purchase in the cracked cement, were roadways, camera towers and isolated blockhouses, together forming a continuous concrete cap upon the island, a functional megalithic architecture as grey and minatory (and apparently as ancient, in its projection into and from time future) as any of Assyria and Babilon.

The series of weapons tests had fused the sand in layers, and the pseudo-geological strata condensed the brief epochs, microseconds in duration, of thermonuclear time. Typically the island inverted the geologist's maxim, 'The key to the past lies in the present.' Here, the key to the present lay in the future. This island was a fossil of time future, its bunkers and blockhouses illustrating the principle that the fossil record of life was one of armour and the exoskeleton.

Traven knelt in the warm pool, and splashed his shirt and trousers. The reflection revealed the watery image of gaunt

shoulders and bearded face. He had come to the island with no supplies other than a small bar of chocolate, assuming that in some way the island would provide its own sustenance. Perhaps, too, he had identified the need for food with a forward motion in time, and that with his return to the past, or at most into a zone of non-time, this need would be eliminated. The privations of the previous six months, during his journey across the Pacific, had already reduced his always thin body to that of a migrant beggar, held together by little more than the preoccupied gaze in his eye. Yet this emaciation, by stripping away the superfluities of the flesh, revealed an inner sinewy toughness, an economy and directness of movement.

For several hours Traven wandered about, inspecting one bunker after another for a convenient place to sleep. He crossed the remains of a small landing field, next to a dump where a dozen B-29s lay across one another like reptile birds.

The Corpses

Once he entered a small street of metal shacks, containing a cafeteria, recreation rooms and shower stalls. A wrecked juke-box lay half-buried in the sand behind the cafeteria, its selection of records still in their rack.

Further along, flung into a small target lake fifty yards from the shacks, were the bodies of what at first he thought were the former inhabitants of this ghost town—a dozen plastic models. Their half-melted faces, contorted into bleary grimaces, gazed up at him from the jumble of legs and torsoes.

On either side of him, muffled by the dunes, came the sounds of waves, the great rollers on the seaward side breaking over the reefs, and on to the beaches within the lagoon. However, he avoided the sea, hesitating before any rise or dune that might take him within its sight. Everywhere the camera towers offered him a convenient aerial view of the confused topography of the island, but he ignored their rusting ladders.

He soon realised that however random the blockhouses and towers might seem, their common focus dominated the landscape and gave to it a unique perspective. As Traven noticed when he sat down to rest in the window slit of one of the bunkers, all these observation posts occupied positions on a series of concentric perimeters, moving in tightening

arcs towards the inmost sanctuary. This ultimate circle, below ground zero, remained hidden beyond a line of dunes a quarter of a mile to the west.

The Terminal Bunker

After sleeping for a few nights in the open, Traven returned to the concrete beach where he had woken on his first morning on the island, and made his home—if the term could be applied to that damp crumbling hovel—in a camera bunker fifty yards from the target lakes. The dark chamber between the thick canted walls, tomb-like though it might seem, gave him a sense of physical reassurance. Outside, the sand drifted against the sides, half-burying the narrow doorway, as if crystallising the immense epoch of time that had elapsed since the bunker's construction. The narrow rectangles of the five camera slits, their shapes and positions determined by the instruments, studded the west wall like cryptic ideograms. Variations on these runic ciphers decorated the walls of the other bunkers, the unique signature of the island. In the mornings, if Traven was awake, he would find the sun divided into its five emblematic beacons.

Most of the time the chamber was filled only by a damp gloomy light. In the control tower at the landing field Traven found a collection of discarded magazines, and used these as a bed. One day, lying in the bunker shortly after the first attack of beri-beri, he pulled out a magazine pressing into his back and found inside a full-page photograph of a six-year-old girl. This blonde-haired child, with her composed expression and self-immersed eyes, filled him with a thousand memories of his son. He pinned the page to the wall and for days gazed at it through his reveries.

For the first few weeks Traven made little attempt to leave the bunker, and postponed any further exploration of the island. The symbolic journey through its inner circles set its own times of arrival and departure. He evolved no routine for himself. All sense of time soon vanished, and his life became completely existential, an absolute break separating one moment from the next like two quantal events. Too weak to forage for food, he lived on the old ration packs he found in the wrecked Superfortresses. Without any implement, it took him all day to open the cans. His physical decline continued, but he watched his spindling

legs and arms with indifference. This lack of loyalty depressed him.

By now he had forgotten the existence of the sea and vaguely assumed the atoll to be part of some continuous continental table. A hundred yards to the north and south of the bunker a line of dunes, topped by the palisade of enigmatic palms, screened the lagoon and sea, and the faint muffled drumming of the waves at night had fused with his memories of war and childhood. To the east was the emergency landing strip and the abandoned aircraft. In the afternoon light their shifting rectilinear shadows made them appear to writhe and pivot. In front of the bunker, where he would sit, was the system of target lakes, the shallow basins extending across the atoll.

Above him, the five camera apertures looked out upon this scene like the tutelary symbols of a futuristic myth.

The Lakes and the Spectres

The lakes had been designed to reveal any radiobiological changes in a selected range of fauna, but the specimens had long since bloomed into grotesque parodies of themselves and been destroyed.

Sometimes in the evenings, when a sepulchral light lay over the concrete bunkers and causeways, and the basins seemed like ornamental lakes in a city of deserted mausoleums, abandoned even by the dead, he would see the spectres of his wife and son standing on the opposite bank. Their solitary figures appeared to have been watching him for hours. Although they never moved, Traven was sure they were beckoning to him. Roused from his reverie, he would stumble forward across the dark sand to the edge of the lake and wade through the water, shouting soundlessly at the two figures as they moved away hand in hand among the lakes and disappeared across the distant causeways.

Shivering with cold, Traven returned to the bunker and laid on the bed of old magazines, waiting for their return. The image of their faces, the pale lantern of his wife's cheeks, floated on that river of memory, lost among the dark archipelagoes of his dreams.

The Blocks (II)

It was not until he discovered the blocks that Traven realised he would never leave the island.

At this stage, some two months after his arrival, Traven had exhausted his small cache of food, and the symptoms of beri-beri had become more acute. The numbness in his hands and feet, and the gradual loss of strength, continued. Only by an immense effort, and the knowledge that the inner sanctum of the island still lay unexplored, did he manage to leave the palliasse of magazines and make his way from the bunker.

As he sat in the drift of sand by the doorway that evening, he noticed a light shining through the palms far into the distance around the atoll. Confusing this with the image of his wife and son, and visualising them waiting for him at some warm hearth among the dunes, Traven set off towards the light. Within a hundred yards he lost his sense of direction. He blundered about for several hours on the edges of the landing strip, and succeeded only in cutting his foot on a broken coca-cola bottle in the sand.

After postponing his search for the night, he set out again in earnest the next morning. As he moved past the towers and blockhouses the heat and silence lay over the island in an unbroken mantle. He had entered a zone devoid of time. Only the narrowing perimeters warned him that he was crossing the inner field of the fire-table.

He climbed the ridge which marked the furthest point in his previous exploration of the island. From the plain beyond the recording towers rose into the air like obelisks. Traven walked down towards them. On their grey walls were the faint outlines of human forms in stylised poses, the flash-shadows of the target community burnt into the cement. Here and there, where the concrete apron had cracked, a line of palms hung in the motionless air. The target lakes were smaller, filled with the broken bodies of plastic dummies. Most of them lay in the inoffensive domestic postures into which they had been placed before the tests.

Beyond the furthest line of dunes, where the camera towers began to turn and face him, were the tops of what seemed to be a herd of square-backed elephants. They were drawn up in precise ranks in a hollow that formed a shallow corral, the sunlight reflected off their backs.

Traven stepped towards them, limping on his cut foot. On either side of him the loosening sand had excavated the dunes, and several of the blockhouses tilted on their sides.

This plain of bunkers stretched for some quarter of a mile, the half-submerged hulks, bombed out onto the surface in some earlier test, like the abandoned wombs that had given birth to this herd of megaliths.

The Blocks (III)

To grasp something of the vast number and oppressive size of the blocks, and their impact upon Traven, one must try to visualise sitting in the shade of one of these concrete monsters, or walking about in the centre of this enormous labyrinth that extended across the central table of the island. There were some two thousand of them, each a perfect cube 15 feet in height, regularly spaced at ten-yard intervals. They were arranged in a series of tracts, each composed of two hundred blocks, inclined to one another and to the direction of the blast. They had weathered only slightly in the years since they were first built, and their gaunt profiles were like the cutting faces of some gigantic die-plate, devised to stamp out rectilinear volumes of air the size of a house. Three of the sides were smooth and unbroken, but the fourth, facing away from the blast, contained a narrow inspection door.

It was this feature of the blocks that Traven found particularly disturbing. Despite the considerable number of doors, by some freak of perspective only those in a single aisle were visible at any point within the maze. As he walked from the perimeter line into the centre of the massif, line upon line of the small metal doors appeared and receded, a world of closed exits concealed behind endless corners.

Approximately twenty of the blocks, those immediately below ground zero, were solid; the walls of the remainder were of varying thickness. From the outside, however, they appeared to be of uniform solidity.

As he entered the first of the long aisles, Traven felt the sense of fatigue that had dogged him begin to lift. His step lightened. With their geometric regularity and finish, the blocks seemed to occupy more than their own volumes of space, imposing on him their calm and order. He walked on into the centre of the maze, eager to shut out the rest of the island. After a few random turns to left and right, he found himself alone, the vistas to the sea, lagoon and island closed.

Here he sat down with his back to one of the blocks, the quest for his wife and son forgotten. The sense of dissocia-

tion set off by the derelict landscape of the island began to recede.

One development he did not expect. With dusk, and the need to leave the blocks and find food, he realised that he had lost himself. However, he retraced his steps, struck out left or right at an oblique course, oriented himself around the setting sun and pressed on resolutely north or south, and found himself back again at his starting point. Only when darkness came did he manage to make his escape.

Abandoning his former home near the aircraft dump, Traven collected together what canned food he could find in the waist turret and cockpit lockers of the Superfortresses. He pulled them across the atoll on a crude sledge. Fifty yards from the perimeter of the blocks he took over a tilting bunker, and pinned the fading photograph of the blonde-haired child to the wall beside the door. The page was falling to pieces, like the fragmenting image of himself. Since the discovery of the blocks he had become a creature of reflexes, kindled from levels above those of his existing nervous system (if the automatic system was dominated by the past, Traven sensed, the cerebro-spinal reached towards the future). Each evening when he awoke, he would eat without appetite and then wander away among the blocks. Sometimes he took a canteen of water with him and remained there for two or three days on end.

The Submarine Pens

This precarious existence continued for the following weeks. As he walked out to the blocks one evening, he again saw his wife and son, standing among the dunes below a camera tower, their faces watching him expressionlessly. He realised that they had followed him across the island from their former haunt among the dried-up lakes. At about this time he once again saw the distant light beckoning, and decided to continue his exploration of the island.

Half a mile further along the atoll, he found a group of four submarine pens, built over an inlet, now drained, which wound through the dunes from the sea. The pens still contained several feet of water, filled with small luminescent fish and algae. The warning light winked at intervals from the apex of a metal scaffold. The remains of a substantial camp, only recently vacated, stood on the pier outside. Greedily,

Traven heaped his sledge with the provisions inside one of the metal shacks.

With this change of diet, the beri-beri receded, and during the next days he returned often to the camp. Evidently it was the site of a biological expedition. In the field office he came across a series of large charts of mutated chromosomes. He rolled them up and took them back to his bunker. The abstract patterns were meaningless, but during his recovery he amused himself by devising suitable titles for them (later, passing the aircraft dump on one of his forays, he found the half-buried juke-box, and tore the list of records from the selection panel. Thus embroidered, the charts took on many layers of cryptic associations).

Traven : In Parenthesis

Elements in a quantal world:

The terminal beach
The terminal bunker
the blocks

* * *

The landscape is coded.

Entry points into the future = Levels in a spinal landscape = zones of significant time.

* * *

August 5. Found the man Traven. A strange derelict figure, hiding in a bunker in the deserted interior of the island. He is suffering from severe exposure and malnutrition, but is unaware of this or, for that matter, of any other events in the world around him . . .

He maintains that he came to the island to carry out some scientific project—unstated—but I suspect that he understands his real motives and the unique role of the island In some way its landscape seems to be involved with certain unconscious notions of time, and in particular with those that may be a repressed premonition of our own deaths. The attractions and dangers of such an architecture, as the past has shown, need no stressing

August 6. He has the eyes of the possessed. I would guess that he is neither the first, nor the last, to visit the island.
— from Dr. C. Osborne, 'Eniwetok Diary.'...

Traven lost within the Blocks

With the exhaustion of his supplies, Traven remained within the perimeter of the blocks almost continuously, conserving what strength remained to him to walk slowly down their empty corridors. The infection in his right foot made it difficult for him to replenish his supplies from the stores left by the biologists, and as his strength ebbed he found less incentive to make his way out of the blocks. The system of megaliths now provided a complete substitute for those functions of his mind which gave to it its sense of the sustained rational order of time and space. Without them, Traven felt his awareness of reality shrinking to little more than the few square inches of sand beneath his feet.

On one of his last ventures into the maze, he spent all night and much of the following morning in a futile attempt to escape. Dragging himself from one rectangle of shadow to another, his leg as heavy as a club and apparently inflamed to the knee, he realised that he must soon find an equivalent for the blocks or he would end his life within them, trapped inside this self-constructed mausoleum as surely as the retinue of Pharaoh.

He was sitting helplessly somewhere in the centre of the system, the faceless lines of tomb-booths receding from him, when the sky was slowly divided by the drone of a light aircraft. This passed overhead, and then, five minutes later, returned. Seizing his opportunity, Traven struggled to his feet and made his exit from the blocks, his head raised to follow the faintly glistening beacon of the exhaust trail.

As he lay in the bunker he dimly heard the aircraft return and carry out an inspection of the site.

A Belated Rescue

"Who are you? A small sandy-haired man peered down at him, an expression of sharp disapproval on his face. He packed a syringe away in his valise. "Do you realise you're on your last legs?"

"Traven . . . I've had some sort of accident. I'm glad you flew over."

"I'm sure you are. But why didn't you use our radio-telephone? Anyway, we'll call the Navy and have you picked up."

"No . . ." Traven sat up on one elbow and felt weakly in his hip pocket. "I have a pass somewhere. I'm carrying out

research."

"Into what?" The question assumed a complete understanding of Traven's motives. He lay in the shade under the lee of the bunker, and drank weakly from a canteen as Dr. Osborne dressed his foot. "You've also been stealing our stores."

Traven shook his head. Fifty yards away the blue and white Cessna stood on the concrete apron like a brilliant dragonfly. "I didn't realise you were coming back."

"You must be in a trance."

The young woman sitting at the controls of the aircraft climbed out and walked over to them. She glanced at the grey bunkers and towers, and seemed unaware or uninterested in the decrepit figure of Traven. Osborne spoke to her and after a downward glance at Traven she went back to the aircraft. As she turned Traven rose involuntarily, recognising the child in the photograph he had pinned to the wall of the bunker. Then he remembered that the magazine could not have been more than four or five years old. Nonetheless, the conviction—indeed, almost a last desperate hope—that the child and the young woman were the same person remained.

The engine of the aircraft started. As Traven watched, it turned on to one of the roadways and took off into the wind.

Later that afternoon she drove over by jeep to the blocks and unloaded a small camp-bed for Traven and a canvas awning. During the intervening hours Traven had slept. He woke refreshed when Osborne returned from his scrutiny of the surrounding dunes.

"What are you doing here?" the young woman asked as she secured the guy-ropes to the roof of the bunker.

Traven watched her move about. "I'm . . . searching for my wife and son."

"They're on this island?" Surprised, but taking the reply at face value, she looked around her.

"In a manner of speaking."

After inspecting the bunker, Osborne joined them. "The child in the photograph—is she your daughter?"

Traven hesitated. "Yes—or rather, she's adopted me."

Unable to make any sense of his replies, but accepting his assurances that he would leave the island, Osborne and the young woman drove back to their camp. Each day Osborne returned to change the dressing, driven by the young woman.

who seemed now to understand the role cast for her by Traven and his private island mythology. Osborne, when he learned of Traven's previous career as a military pilot, appeared to suspect that he might be a latter-day martyr left high and dry by the moratorium on thermonuclear tests.

"A guilt complex isn't an indiscriminate supply of moral sanctions. I think you may be over-stretching yours." When he mentioned the name Eatherly, Traven shook his head.

Undeterred, Osborne pressed: "Are you sure you're not making similar use of the image of Eniwetok—waiting for your Pentecostal wind?"

"Believe me, Doctor, no," Traven replied firmly. "For me the Hydrogen Bomb was a symbol of absolute freedom. Unlike Eatherly, I feel it's given me the right—the obligation, even—to do anything I choose."

"That seems strange logic," Osborne commented. "Aren't we at least responsible for our physical selves, if for nothing else?"

"Not now, I think," Traven replied. "In effect, aren't we men raised from the dead?"

Often, however, he thought of Eatherly.

* * *

Eatherly: the prototypal Pre-Third Man—dating the Pre-Third from August 6, 1945—carrying a full load of cosmic guilt.

* * *

Shortly after Traven was strong enough to walk he had to be rescued from the blocks for a second time. Osborne became less conciliatory.

"Our work is almost complete," he said warningly. "You'll die here, Traven. What *are* you looking for among those blocks?"

To himself, Traven murmured: The tomb of the unknown civilian, *Homo hydrogenensis*, Eniwetok Man. "Doctor," he said thoughtfully, "your laboratory is at the wrong end of this island."

Tartly, Osborne replied: "I'm aware of that, Traven. There are rarer fish swimming in your head than in any submarine pen."

On the day before they left, the young woman drove Traven over to the lakes where he had first arrived. As a final present, an ironic gesture unexpected from the elderly biologist, she had brought from Osborne the correct list of

legends for the chromosome charts. They stopped by the derelict juke-box and she pasted them on to the selection panel.

They wandered among the supine wrecks of the Super-fortresses. Traven lost sight of her, and for the next ten minutes searched in and out of the dunes. He found her standing in a small amphitheatre formed by the sloping mirrors of a solar energy device built by one of the visiting expeditions. She smiled to Traven as he stepped through the scaffolding, waiting for him motionlessly with her bland eyes. But the dozen fragmented images of themselves reflected in the broken panes—in some she was sans head, in others a dozen multiples of her arms circled about her like the serpent limbs of a Hindu goddess—filled Traven with a sense of exhaustion. Turning swiftly, he walked back to the jeep.

As they drove away he recovered himself. He described his glimpses of his wife and son. "Their faces are always calm," he said. "My son's particularly, though he was never really like that. I remember him always laughing. The only time his face wore a grave expression was when he was being born—then he seemed millions of years old."

The young woman nodded. "I hope you find them." As an afterthought she added: "Dr. Osborne is going to tell the Navy that you're here. Hide somewhere."

Traven thanked her.

From the centre of the blocks he waved to her the following day when she flew away for the last time.

The Naval Party

When the search party came for him, Traven hid in the only logical place. Fortunately the search was perfunctory, and was called off after a few hours. The sailors had brought a supply of beer with them and the search soon turned into a drunken excursion.

On the walls of the recording towers Traven later found balloons of obscene dialogue chalked into the mouths of the shadow figures, giving their postures the priapic gaiety of the dancers in cave drawings.

The climax of the party was the ignition of a store of gasoline in an underground tank near the air-strip. As he listened, first to the megaphones shouting his name, the echoes receding among the dunes like the forelorn calls of

dying birds, then to the boom of the explosion and the laughter as the landing craft left, Traven felt a premonition that these were the last sounds he would hear.

He had hidden in one of the target basins, lying among the broken bodies of the plastic models. In the hot sunlight the dozens of deformed faces gaped at him sightlessly from the tangle of limbs, their blurred smiles like those of the laughing dead.

Their faces filled his mind as he climbed over the bodies and returned to his bunker. As he walked towards the blocks he saw the figures of his wife and son standing in his path. They were less than ten yards from him, their white faces watching him with a look of almost overwhelming expectancy. Never had Traven seen them so close to the blocks. His wife's pale features seemed illuminated from within, her lips parted as if in greeting, one hand raised to take his own. His son's grave face, with its curiously fixed expression, regarded him with the same enigmatic smile of the child in the photograph.

"Judith! David!" Startled, Traven ran towards them. Then, in a sudden movement of the light, their clothes turned into shrouds, and he saw the wounds that disfigured their necks and chests. Appalled, he cried out. As they vanished he fled into the safety of the blocks.

The Catechism of Goodbye

This time he found himself, as Osborne had predicted, unable to leave the blocks.

Somewhere in the centre of the maze, he sat with his back against one of the concrete flanks, his eyes raised to the sun. Around him the lines of cubes formed the horizons of his world. At times they would appear to advance towards him, looming over him like cliffs, the intervals between them narrowing so that they were little more than an arm's breadth apart, a labyrinth of corridors running between them. Then they would recede from him, separating from each other like points in an expanding universe, until the nearest line formed an intermittent palisade along the horizon.

Time had become quantal. For hours it would be noon, the shadows contained within the blocks, the heat reverberating off the concrete floor. Abruptly, he would find that it was early afternoon, or mid-morning, everywhere the pointing fingers of the shadows. Only the declining gradient of his

own exhaustion gave him any indication of the days that passed. Sometimes he would make a futile attempt to escape from the labyrinth, and wander among the corridors, finally taking up his seat against one of the blocks, uncertain whether this was a new one or that which he had left.

"*Goodbye, Eniwetok,*" he murmured.

Somewhere there was a flicker of light, as if one of the blocks, like a counter on an abacus, had been plucked away.

Goodbye, Los Alamos. Again, a block seemed to vanish. The corridors around him remained intact, but somewhere in his mind had appeared a small neutral interval.

Goodbye, Hiroshima

Goodbye, Alamagordo

Goodbye, Moscow

Goodbye, London

Goodbye, Paris

Goodbye, New York

Shuttles flickered, a ripple of lost integers.

Goodbye, —

He stopped, realising the futility of this megathlon farewell. Such a leave-taking required him to inscribe his signature upon every one of the particles in the universe.

Total Noon : Eniwetok

The blocks now occupied positions on an endlessly revolving circus wheel. Around and around they moved, carrying him upwards to heights from which he could see the whole island and the sea, and then down again through the disc of the concrete floor. From here he looked up at the under-surface of this concrete cap, an inverted landscape of rectilinear hollows, the dome-shaped mounds of the lake-system, the thousands of empty cubic pits of the blocks.

"Goodbye, Traven"

Near the end, he found to his disappointment that this ultimate rejection gained him nothing.

In an interval of lucidity, he looked down at his emaciated arms and legs, decorated with a lace-work of ulcers, propped loosely in front of him, the brittle wrists and hands like parcels of bones. To his right was a trail of disturbed dust, the wavering trail of slack heels.

To his left lay a long corridor between the blocks, joining an oblique series a hundred yards away. Among these, where

a narrow interval revealed the open space beyond, was a crescent-shaped shadow, poised in the air above the ground.

During the next half an hour it moved slowly, turning as the sun swung, the profile of a dune.

The Crevice

Seizing on this cipher, which hung before him like a symbol on a shield, Traven pushed himself through the dust. He climbed precariously to his feet, and shielded his eyes from all sight of the blocks. He moved forward a few paces at a time, following the scimitar of shadow as it came nearer.

Ten minutes later he emerged from the western perimeter of the blocks, like some tottering mendicant leaving behind a silent desert city. The dune whose shadow had guided him lay fifty yards from him. Beyond it, bearing its shadow like a screen, was a ridge of limestone that ran among the hillocks of a wasteland beyond this point of the atoll. The remains of an old bulldozer, bales of barbed wire and fifty-gallon drums lay half-buried in the sand. Traven approached the dune, reluctant now to leave this anonymous swell of sand. He shuffled around its edges, and sat down in the mouth of a shallow crevice below the brow of the ridge.

After dusting his clothes, he gazed out patiently at the great circle of blocks.

Ten minutes later he noticed that someone was watching him.

The Marooned Japanese

This corpse, whose eyes stared up at Traven, lay to his left at the bottom of the crevice. That of a man of middle age and strong build, it rested on its back with its head on a pillow of stone, hands outstretched at its sides, as if surveying the window of the sky. The fabric of the clothes had rotted to a bleached grey vestment, but in the absence of any small animal predators on the island the skin and musculature of the corpse had been preserved. Here and there, at the angle of knee or wrist, a bony point glinted through the leathery integument of the yellow skin, but the facial mask was still intact, and revealed a male Japanese of the professional classes. Looking down at the strong nose, high forehead and broad mouth and chin, Traven guessed that the Japanese had been a doctor or lawyer.

Puzzled as to how the corpse had found itself here, Traven slid a few feet down the slope. There were no radiation burns on the skin, which indicated that the Japanese had been there for five years or less. Nor did he appear to be wearing a uniform, so had not been some unfortunate member of a military or scientific party—besides, the slope of the crevice was little more than a few degrees from the horizontal.

To the left of the corpse, within reach of his hand, was a frayed leather case, the remains of a map wallet. To the right was the bleached husk of a haversack, open to reveal a canteen of water and a small mess-tin.

Greedily, the reflex of starvation making him for the moment ignore this discovery that the Japanese had deliberately chosen to die in the crevice, Traven slid down the slope until his feet touched the splitting soles of the corpse's shoes. He reached out and seized the canteen, then prised off the lid. A cupful of flat water swilled weakly around the rusting bottom. Traven gulped down the water, the dissolved metal salts cloaking his tongue with a bitter film. The mess-tin was empty but for a tacky coating of condensed syrup. Traven scraped at this with the lid. He chewed at the tarry flakes, letting them dissolve in his mouth with a dark intoxicating sweetness. After a few moments he felt light-headed, and sat back beside the corpse in a delirium of exhaustion.

Its sightless eyes regarded him with unmoving compassion.

The Fly

(A small fly, which Traven presumes has followed him into the fissure, now buzzes about the corpse's face. Guiltily, Traven leans forward to kill it, then reflects that perhaps this minuscule sentry has been the corpse's faithful companion, in return fed on the rich liqueurs and distillations of its pores. Carefully, to avoid injuring the fly, he encourages it to alight on his wrist).

DR. YASUDA: Thank you, Traven. *(The voice is rough, as if unused to conversation).* In my position, you understand . . .

TRAVER: Of course, Doctor. I'm sorry I tried to kill it—these ingrained habits, you know, they're not easy to shrug off. Your sister's children in Osaka in '44, the exigencies of war, I hate to plead them, most known motives are so despicable, one searches the unknown in the hope that . . .

YASUDA: Please, Traven, do not be embarrassed. The fly is lucky to retain its identity for so long. The son you mourn, not to mention my own two nieces and nephew, did they not die for us each day? Every parent in the world grieves for the lost sons and daughters of their earlier childhoods.

TRAVEN: You're very tolerant, Doctor. I wouldn't dare—

YASUDA: Not at all, Traven. I make no apologies for you. After all, each of us is little more than the residue of the infinite unrealised possibilities of our lives. But your son, and my nephew, are now fixed in our minds forever, their identities as certain as the stars.

TRAVEN: (*not entirely convinced*) That may be so, Doctor, but it leads to a dangerous conclusion in the case of this island. For instance, the blocks.

YASUDA: They are precisely to what I refer, Traven. Here among the blocks you at last find an image of yourself free of the doubtful attractions of time and space. This ... island is an ontological Garden of Eden, why seek to expel yourself into a world of quantal flux?

TRAVEN: Excuse me. (*The fly has flown back to the corpse's face and sits in one of the dried-up orbits, giving the good doctor an expression of quizzical beadiness. Reaching forward, Traven entices it on to his palm. He examines it carefully*). Well, yes, these bunkers of course are ontological objects, but whether this is the ontological fly seems doubtful. It's true that on this island it's the *only* fly, which is the next best thing . . .

YASUDA: You can't accept the plurality of the universe—ask yourself *why*. Why should this obsess you? It seems to me, Traven, that you are hunting for the white leviathan, zero. The beach is a dangerous zone. Avoid it. Have a proper humility, pursue a philosophy of acceptance.

TRAVEN: Then may I ask why you came here, Doctor?

YASUDA: To feed this fly. 'What greater love —— ?'

TRAVEN: (*still puzzling*) It doesn't really solve my problem. The blocks, you see . . .

YASUDA: Very well, if you must have it that way . . .

TRAVEN: But, Doctor —

YASUDA: (*peremptorily*) Kill that fly.

TRAVEN: That's not an end, or a beginning.

(*Hopelessly, he kills the fly. Exhausted, he falls asleep beside the corpse*).

The Terminal Beach

Searching for a piece of rope in the refuse dump behind the dunes, Traven found a bale of rusty wire. After unwinding this he secured a harness around the corpse's chest and dragged it from the crevice. The lid of a wooden crate served as a sledge. Traven fastened the corpse to it in a sitting position, and set off along the perimeter of the blocks. Around him the island remained silent. The lines of palms hung in the sunlight, only his own motion varying the shifting ciphers of their criss-crossing trunks. The square turrets of the camera towers jutted from the dunes like forgotten obelisks.

An hour later, when Traven reached the awning by his bunker, he untied the wire cord he had fastened around his waist. He took the chair left for him by Dr. Osborne and carried it to a point midway between the bunker and the blocks. Then he tied the body of the Japanese to the chair, arranging the hands so that they rested on the wooden arms. This gave the moribund figure a posture of calm repose.

This done to his satisfaction, Traven returned to the bunker and squatted under the awning.

As the next days passed into weeks, the dignified figure of the Japanese sat in his chair fifty yards from him, guarding Traven from the blocks. Their magic still filled Traven's reveries, but he now had sufficient strength to rouse himself at intervals and forage for food. In the hot sunlight the skin of the Japanese became more and more bleached, and sometimes Traven would wake at night and find the white figure sitting there, arms resting at its sides, in the shadows that crossed the concrete floor. At these moments he would see his wife and son watching him from the dunes. As time passed they came closer, and he would sometimes find them only a few yards behind him.

Patiently Traven waited for them to speak to him, thinking of the great blocks whose entrance was guarded by the seated figure of the dead archangel, as the waves broke on the distant shore and the burning bombers fell through his dreams.

j. g. ballard.

Few writers who have speculated upon Time travel have ever thought about the possible repercussions such an event would have upon the wide background of history. While the event depicted here by John Baxter is an individual one, he also shows the chaos which could arise in a country where Time travel is an ordered science.

the traps of time

by john baxter

Along the balustrade the crystal roses grew in silence, suspended in their baths of fluid. Blue, green, amber, red; each fed on its particular salt and drew colour from the colourless water. Still wrapped in his sleeping robe, Net San Yada walked along the row, examining them in turn. Some were still tight balls of foliage on the end of a naked stalk. Others were barely budding, but one, a pale green, was trembling on the lip of full bloom. So, so carefully he put his hand into the tank and with a slight twist broke the stem. As he drew it out, a few drops trickled from the innermost recesses of the flower.

Then he held it in his hand, separated from its native element but still bearing in its green translucency memories of the sea. Triumphantlly he carried the flower inside and installed it in a niche. The plucking of so perfect a rose was an excellent start to the day.

Stripping off his sleeping robe, Yada began to dress. He did this slowly and carefully, clothing his body with almost religious reverence. The choice of which fold would give the best drape to a robe, the sash most exactly matching his

stockings—to him, these were decisions as important as any he would be called upon to make as Primus of Time Control. Although there was a bite in the air today, the people he had seen in the streets were gay in white or pale brown. A summer robe then. He chose one of light grey wool and slipped into it. On his breast the blue disc of his rank was like a patch of sky seen through sullen clouds. As he knotted the sash, he smiled with satisfaction at the emblem. A blue circle at his age—and no reason why he should not go even higher.

Dressed, scented, his hair knotted at the back of his head and the widow's peak trimmed just enough to emphasise his face's saturnine leanness, Yada began the day's work. The unbroken expanse of matting in a completely unfurnished room was all the office he needed. Sinking cross-legged to the floor, he folded his arms and considered the day's business. First, the matter of staff needed twenty-five years uptime in Katsaido. He had considered the problem overnight and now was sure that at least forty men should be sent. It would be hard on them. Within twenty-five years Katsaido turned into a bleak hell of howling wind and snow where men died quickly. But a high official had offered to pay well if certain irritating elements were removed from the community, so . . .

He made a note in the blank corner of his mind that was his memorandum pad and then passed on to the next matter. As yet, Time travelling in this sector was limited to the occasional survey unit passing through and, even more rarely, a short pleasure trip for the local dignitaries. Yada and his people were still on probation, and would be for many years to come. This meant there was a lack of much vital data that would allow him to move around freely in time. What bribe, then, should he offer to an out-time courier to gain unlimited access to sector co-ordinates? This was quite a problem, and one which required great finesse and care.

For this reason he was irritated when a discreet scratching on the outside of his screen announced that he had a visitor. Who would it be at this hour? Certainly somebody important, otherwise the servants would not have disturbed him. Composing his face, Yada tapped out his permission to enter. Silently the door slid open.

Almost as soon as he saw the towering figure in the doorway, Yada was planning what to do. The chill horror of the black robe with its accusing white square was snatched up and locked away in the inner recesses of his mind where the nightmares hid. To the Claimer, Net San Yada looked as unworried as the most innocent citizen.

"I greet you, White Square," Yada said formally.

The other bowed, his hands held so rigidly to his side that they seemed pinned there.

"I greet you also." He paused. Then: "You are claimed, Blue Circle."

It was a death sentence, but Yada let the words hang in the air like a thread of smoke, noticeable yet unimportant.

"May I know by whom?"

"You may," the Claimer said slowly. "By the kin of Sent Sa Knio, for offences against the honour of the family."

So Knio had let something slip. They would have killed him, of course, or forced him to commit suicide, and now they wanted blood. There were few things that would anger a clan more than to have a member bribed to betray family secrets. Escape appeared to be impossible. But there was one course open to him.

Gracefully Yada rose from the floor.

"I thank you for the message," he said. "If you will wait in the next room, I will prepare."

The Claimer bowed and turned to leave. There was no question in his mind that Yada would join him in a few moments. To attempt escape would be an unthinkable breach of honour, but Yada was no gentleman. With the speed and sinuousness of a cat he leaped on the departing man. The blade he kept always hidden in his sash sank into the broad back. He gave a thin bird-like cry, more of shock than pain, and reached convulsively for the handle that jutted from between his shoulder blades. For a moment he stood frozen in an attitude of unbelieving agony. Then he crashed dead to the floor.

Sick with fear and horror, Yada leaned weakly against the door frame staring down at his victim. Counterpointed against his gasping breath he heard a strange sound, like a soft sad wail. He looked around. In its niche the crystal rose was singing to itself. Some harmonic in the dying cry had struck a vital chord in its structure.

As he watched the note rose higher, hovering on the edges of audibility. Throwing wide its green petals the rose burst into final ecstatic bloom. Then the sound ceased abruptly and the flower crumbled into dust. Yada wasted no time in considering the significance of this omen. Savagely he crashed open the sliding door of the next room and walked to the far wall. It appeared to be of timber as were the others, but when he pressed against it the thin veneer tore like paper.

Behind the false wall a tiny cubicle housed the glass and wire cage of a Time traveller. It had cost many lives to steal the secret of this machine and even more to manufacture and hide it in his house, but now the investment was paying its dividend. Brushing aside the remains of the wall, Yada eased himself into the seat. The wires curved themselves protectively around him. He turned on the main switch and, as the machine warmed up, checked the supplies of food, the weapons and the extra clothing he had stored here long ago against just such an emergency as this.

Through the gap in the wall the quiet rooms of his home beckoned. Perhaps, he found himself thinking, it was not really necessary to run. Perhaps he could still brazen it out. But he knew it was too late. Already the interstices between the wires were misting over with a golden nimbus and the machine was vibrating eagerly under his feet. He took one last look at his world. Then he pushed the lever.

BREAKOUT!

The man on spotting duty blinked and took one more careful look at the flashing light. Then he punched the alarm button and kept punching.

"Breakout, Breakout, Breakout!" he bawled into the microphone. "All personnel to stations. Full red alert. *Breakout!*"

The alarm came to Ley Farrar, Chief Monitor of Time City, as he was interviewing a visitor from out-time. He was an envoy from the African-dominated 22nd century, a magnificent figure of a man in the traditional varicoloured robes of an African ambassador. On the loggia, the city's nearest approach to a business office, he was like a brilliant butterfly among moths. Against the blazing colours of his clothing, that of the strolling monitors looked drab. With amusement, Farrar noticed him looking out across Time City. The wide parks dotted with low inconspicuous dwellings obviously surprised him.

"Time City," he commented diplomatically, "is not quite as I had pictured it."

Farrar smiled. "I suppose not," he said, remembering the soaring steel-glass slabs of 22nd century Jo'burg baking under a blistering sun. "We don't go in much for high-density living here. The transport system . . ."

At that instant the howl of the general alarm tore across the evening quiet like a scream for help. Farrar didn't hesitate. Before the first five-second blast was done, he was off and running towards the control complex.

Speed, however, soon became out of the question. The usually quiet corridors of Time City had been turned into shouting torrents of humanity. Slow walkers sprawled, trays of crockery crashed to the floor and were crushed underfoot. Along the halls open doors gaped on rooms where the normal activities of life had been suddenly suspended. Phones hung from their cords, taps ran into overflowing baths, and in one cabin an electric razor hummed quietly to itself.

Pushing with the best of them, Farrar shouldered his way through the press as fast as he could. On the observation mezzanine around the control room the crowd thinned as men slid efficiently into their places. Taking the curving steps two at a time, he ran to the console of the nearest operator. Risking a glance over his shoulder, the man nodded in an approximation of deference and went back to his frantic manipulation of the controls.

"What's the story?" Farrar asked, though he could see most of it written in the crawling lights.

"Breakout in Sector 17, sir—39th century. Seems to have cut across 18, 19 and perhaps 20. There's a probe out to check but it's going to be hard spotting him in there."

"Accident, would you say?"

"Probably not. We can account for all our machines in 17. There's been no record of any movement for the last two days. Looks like an unauthorised private machine."

"Uncontrolled then."

"Probably. No tell-tale, no automatic homing signal. Big trouble."

Farrar knew that already. How big the trouble was would depend on how quickly he acted in the next few hours.

He stepped back from the console and looked along the row of glowing boards on either side of him. At each, a man whose hands moved with the speed and assurance of a concert pianist was plotting the new paths that travellers would have to use, setting up warnings to avoid the danger zone and trying to guess what would happen next.

As Farrar watched, he could see the men gradually take control of the situation, checking it as one checks a runaway horse. They worked well, like the highly-trained team that they had become in the few years since Time City had been in existence. Yet it angered Farrar in some ways. It was such useless work. In the time probe with its tv eye they had the means of foreseeing any event and reaching forward in time to check it. But there were thousands of centuries to examine, millions of emergencies to deal with.

For every one that was foreseen, a dozen were missed and remained unknown until they burst right on top of them. Perhaps in a few decades . . . but it was no use mourning the fact that there are only twenty-four hours in each day. Time control could change only a few things and this was not one of them.

Within a few minutes the boards had settled down. The lanes of light that represented navigable time tracks were no longer broken by the dark spots of travellers. Here and there markers showed where a grounded machine was sitting out the emergency. Across lanes fifteen, sixteen and seventeen, a dark terminator ruled off the closed area where the illegal traveller had hopelessly fouled the time stream. Inside this area time travel was forbidden—in fact impossibly dangerous. On the intercom there was still a continuous roar as new co-ordinates were supplied and travellers redirected but it was less urgent than it had been. Time City was doing the job it had been built to do.

Turning his back on the confusion, Farrar walked back up to the mezzanine. It would be a while before there was more concrete news, so he had nothing to do—except wait. Yet waiting was often the hardest thing of all to do well. He looked around almost desperately for some object to divert his mind from the inevitable anxiety, and found a huddled figure standing by the rail, looking down in fascinated contemplation of the activity beneath him. He

walked over and laid a hand companionably on the African's shoulder.

In the well of the control room, lights in a multitude of vivid colours crawled and flickered, huge shadows blotted the walls with images grotesquely distorted. There was an incessant to and fro of running men, a roar of voices and noise that was magnified as weirdly as the shadows. It looked like the pit of hell.

Taking a firmer grip on the man's shoulder, Farrar led him outside. There was nobody on the loggia now. The brilliant sunset poured in between the columns unappreciated, unseen. The only movement came from a little fountain that chattered to itself in the shadows. They sat down beside it.

"Sorry about that," Farrar explained. "We've had a breakout!"

The African, with a visible effort, brought himself back to earth. Almost painfully his eyes came again into focus.

"Breakout?" he said, politely baffled.

"An illegal Time jump," Farrar explained. "Apparently someone in the 39th century made himself a Time machine and jumped into the 48th—the wrong part of the 48th."

Abruptly the envoy's face lost the last of its awe-struck expression. His eyes narrowed shrewdly.

"I had no idea there were prohibited areas," he said quietly. He could already see himself framing the question he would put to the UN about this unwarranted encroachment on freedom of movement.

The significance of this sudden change was not lost on Farrar. As casually as he could, he leaned back and smiled.

"Prohibited areas? Oh, no—I'd hardly call them that. There are just certain sections of the Time stream where travel has to be rigidly supervised." It would be tedious to go through it all again for what must be the thousandth time, though perhaps it might do him good—take his mind off the crisis.

"Look at it this way," he continued. "The conventional image of Time, the way most of us visualise it, is a stream—a sort of river, Right?" (*Except that it doesn't flow, he added to himself. And doesn't behave like any liquid known to man. And flows in at least five dimensions. And was an incalculably more complex subject than anybody thought.*) "Well, think of Time flowing like. . . like this fountain here."

He turned in gratitude to the narrow trough where the fountain emptied itself into the pump to be recirculated. In the gently sloping channel a stream of water flowed smoothly, endlessly.

"It looks smooth, doesn't it?" Farrar said. "But look at that surface. Even in a smooth trough like this there are inconsistencies. The stream also runs faster at the centre than at the sides, and faster at the top than at the bottom. Yet compared with the Time stream, this is a model of predictability. The trouble with Time is that it has people in it, and events—in other words, history. History isn't rigid. It lies in Time like a thread of colour in water, like the stain of a dissolving dye. The slightest movement can jolt it, disturb its flow."

The African looked interested. "So the old paradoxes—killing your own father, going back to prehistory and changing the course of Time by crushing a single plant—these things could happen?"

Farrar nodded seriously. "In practice, it's infinitely worse. Even the actual act of moving towards the past could wipe out everything for millenia. Unwittingly you may wipe out not only your father but your entire race."

Turning to the fountain he placed a finger in the swiftly flowing water. Immediately it began to eddy and bubble around the obstruction. Turbulences appeared.

"You see, even when I put one small object in the stream there are disturbances. If someone just dives in and strikes out against the current, the result is catastrophic. We call that a breakout."

"But in this case, the man managed to complete his jump. Surely that proves that no serious damage has been done. If he had disturbed Time, wouldn't he have been wiped out along with all the other events he was caught up in?"

Farrar shook his head. "I'm afraid Time has a trick up its sleeve. Whether it uses it or not is the important thing. You see, the stream . . ."

He stopped and glanced sharply towards the steps. An orderly was hurrying towards them. From his hand trailed a strip of white graph paper. Farrar snatched it up eagerly.

"Good or bad?" he said.

The man grimaced. "The worst."

He looked at the red lines scribed across the paper and nodded bleakly.

"I suppose the fool deserves it," he said, "but I can't help feeling sorry for him."

Yada brought the machine back somewhere in the dead centuries after the last of the atomic wars. He had chosen the spot carefully after poring for hours over the few charts available to him. No place could be safer. Nobody came here any more. The earth was burned barren. Only a few people remained and they were hidden deep underground, cowering from the now-vanished thunder of the bombs. It would be years before they crept out of their shelters and set about rebuilding civilization. Until then, Yada was safe. He had time to prepare, time to plan.

Even before the web of wires had begun to lose its glow, he could feel the chill bite of the wind. It blew endlessly, bitterly, sweeping up everything in its path and grinding it to dust. Insistent fingers plucked at his robe, importuning him to join its ceaseless ranging of the globe. Yada huddled deeper into his seat and gathered his robes about him.

Through the waning radiance he saw a landscape swept of all but essentials. A flat grey plain stretched away in all directions but one. On the remaining horizon a vast range of mountains reared up, supporting on its back the leaden sky. There was an alien look about them. They were too high, too sharp. On one a glacier of black ice snaked down like a path to hell.

Deliberately ignoring their towering presence Yada began his work. First, a heavy sheepskin jacket thrown over his gown to keep out the cold. Then food. He broke open his pack of rations and prepared a meal. This he did with great care, husbanding the tiny flame of the spirit lamp and measuring out the spices and shreds of dried meat with the care of a lapidary weighing gems. This was all he had left—his skill, his ability to do things carefully and well. He luxuriated in this poor wealth, counting as precious each moment in which he was allowed to display it.

When the meal was prepared he piled the steaming food into his best bowl and sat in the shelter of the machine to eat it. As the food stoked the labouring boilers of his body he felt better. The situation was, after all, not as bad as it might have been. He had escaped certain death—that alone was worth the risks he had taken. But on top of this he had brought with him food, clothing and weapons. With this raw

material and his own innate ability it should not be hard for him to find a time in which to settle down and amass another fortune. He smiled to himself.

Perhaps a little treat might even be in order. From the rations he chose a waxed container of preserved fruit and gulped down its contents, cheerfully letting the syrup drip off his chin.

Not long after cleaning up, he noticed the light was failing. Odd. It had been quite bright when he arrived. He remembered seeing the sun as a patch of cold radiance behind the clouds. Eating must have taken longer than he thought. For a moment he debated whether to bunk down immediately or spend a little more time making preparations, but already dusk was closing in and the horizon had disappeared in the gloom.

Climbing into the tiny cabin he wrapped the extra clothing around him and settled down as best he could. By the time he was comfortable the sky was pitch black. There was no moon, no stars. The world had disappeared, blotted out as if no longer existed. Yada drifted into an uneasy sleep.

He awoke with aching muscles, a nauseous feeling in his stomach and almost as much fatigue as before. Bright daylight lanced in through his half-closed eyes and stirred the suggestion of a headache with which he had woken. As he opened the lids wider the pain increased in intensity, and he remembered with regret that his supplies had not included any drugs sufficiently mild to cure it. The sun was well up, peering down from among the mountain peaks at the insignificant specimen of humanity below. Its light gave no warmth, and the wind blew as strongly as ever.

Squeezing out of the cabin Yada blew on his hands and stamped his feet to force some feeling into them. He felt as if he had hardly closed his eyes. Casually he glanced at his chronometer. The figures on the dial made him start. He put it to his ear, but the sedate hum of the power unit indicated that it was still working. Yet according to the watch he had slept only two hours!

Two hours! That was ridiculous. Night on earth at any latitude should never be less than seven hours. Surely the machine hadn't brought him out in the wrong Time sector? He turned to check the controls but they seemed to be

accurate enough. For a moment he stood by the machine, trying to think the problem out. It was then that he noticed his shadow was moving. As smoothly as the hand of a clock it was edging around him.

Almost against his will he looked upwards at the pale sun that, slowly yet perceptibly, was moving across the sky. In the space of a few minutes it had waxed from dawn to early afternoon. Soon it was getting darker and the sun seemed to hurry towards the night. As it dropped towards the horizon a brief sunset flared orange, red, indigo, then sank into black. Night enveloped Yada in a cold blanket of darkness. He stood unmoving, petrified. The only sound was the beating of his heart and the endless sighing of the wind.

It was less than five minutes before the sun rose again. As it came up over the mountains, Yada saw that they too were in subtle motion. Landslides crashed from the peaks and fields of snow, flickered and crawled on the slopes like bright shadows—and the glacier was moving. No longer a slowly creeping mass it flowed in a dark torrent down the mountain and disappeared into the earth as smoothly as if it was being eaten up.

Again the sun leaped across the sky and plunged down leaving the world in darkness. The wind was rising, and beneath his feet the earth trembled. For the first time Yada felt the urge to escape, but in the blackness the controls were unreadable. Panic flowed over him in a wave, but suddenly it was replaced by a feeling of quiet resignation.

Deliberately he stepped out of the cabin and turned his back on the machine. It did not matter any more. Nothing mattered any more, only the final moments and the long journey to whatever lay beyond. The light was returning now, he noted with detached interest, though it was not the light of the sun. A blue glow illuminated everything, giving even the bleak plain a look of softness and reflection. The light grew brighter, and then brighter still. He felt his skin prickle and his lungs began to burn. The air was suddenly thinner, colder. He took one last breath—then the light, the thunder and the earthquake burst on him. He remembered nothing more.

The team brought back the machine as well as the body. Incredulously Farrar examined the wreckage after it had been pulled out of the grab.

"Incredible," he said. "Did the fool actually travel across four sectors in *this*?"

"Hard to believe," the team leader said. His batman was still helping him out of his respirator, pressure suit and armour. Only the upper part of his head showed above the encapsulating protection of his suit. The rest of the team lumbered around the room as clumsily as the huge armoured crustaceans they most resembled.

"It's just a cockleshell," he continued. "No monitor, no autopilot, no outside protection at all. When the vortex caught up with him he didn't have a chance."

"Dead?" Farrar said.

"What else? Decompression got him mainly. That area has been tossed around an awful lot, especially during the wars. Just at a guess, I'd say in the last few seconds the air density there dropped from normal to the equivalent of fifteen thousand feet. And on top of that he got a dose of radiation that would kill a hundred men."

"Radiation? I didn't know that part of the stream was still hot."

"It isn't." Taking a crumpled sheet of paper from his pouch the man smoothed it out on the table. Five red traces crawled across it, roughly parallel. On each, at approximately the same point, there was a tiny nick where the pen had jiggled momentarily. In four cases the line settled down again after the disturbance. But in the fifth it had not. Instead the trace curved around in a shaky circle, recrossed itself and continued on. The man stabbed a huge gloved finger at the circle.

"You can see it's a big vortex. His movement across the stream must have caused about a four century twister. Now two centuries downtime there are still atomic wars. It looks like the whirlpool snatched up some part of that period and . . . well, you can imagine."

Farrar nodded and looked down at the mangled machine. He could imagine—but the poor devil in *this* couldn't have. He would never have known what hit him, could never have realised that the sudden holocaust into which he was thrown was of his own making. Time flows, yes—but when disturbed it also eddies, and occasionally when the disturbance is great enough it turns on itself in a titanic whirlpool. It twists, turns, recrosses its path and, anxious to move on again, roars up

along its old bed. Faster, faster, tumbling over itself and engulfing anything and anybody in its way.

There was a wry kind of justice in the way this jumper had been killed by the laws he broke rather than any outside agency. It would be a warning to others who tried to jump Time without thinking of the consequences. *And a warning too*, said a small voice, *that men should not tamper with things they ill-understood.* But Farrar did not listen to that.

Out on the plain there was silence now, but not the silence of peace. In the deepening dusk shadowed figures stumbled about, hopelessly lost. Sometimes they met and looked into each others eyes with dumb horror, then wandered on. Like scraps of debris left by the flood, they littered the ruined years. On every face there was the look of terror and utter loneliness. They remembered the grave, and they did not want to die again.

john baxter

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When a man and his wife have been happily married for some time an indefinable link grows between them—a bond of understanding almost telepathic in its closeness—but if the link is broken, what happens to the remaining partner ?

unfinished business

clifford c. reed

“What it comes down to is that I’m standing in your way,” Valerie said. “If it weren’t for me you’d jump at the chance.”

Eric shrugged. “Putting it like that,” he conceded, “you’re right.” He shook his head. “But don’t put it like that. You’ve read the investigation report on Star 23. Classification—‘Hazardous. Survival insurance limited to Pioneer operators.’ Put it that I think too much of my wife to want to murder her.”

“You don’t *know* that I’d die.”

“Near enough know. Those sort of conditions don’t make it better than a thousand to one chance.”

“They’ll improve.”

“Sure. In ten years’ time I wouldn’t hesitate. Today, as things are, now, it’s—thank you for putting me on the short list, gentlemen, but I regret I cannot accept.”

“If you weren’t married, you’d go.”

He got up and went over to her. “If I weren’t married I wouldn’t have had the happiest year any man ever had.” He put his arms round her. “So stop talking rubbish.”

“You don’t think — ?”

"What?"

"That you'll regret it. Later."

"You're asking me if I've got a crystal ball. It could be, in a way, there'll be a feeling of having turned down this particular opportunity." He smiled. "People have done that before. For a good enough reason. Such as I've got. I don't need a crystal ball to tell you the answer to that one. You're worth a darn sight more than this opportunity, and that's something I won't ever regret."

She looked up, half smiling, still half troubled. "You're sure."

"I'm sure. I'll always be sure."

The sound of thunder interrupted them. She twisted her arm, looked at her watch. "Time I went."

He frowned. "It's a bad night."

"So-so." She lifted her chin in pretended indignation. "Are you suggesting I'm a bad flier? Of course, *I'm* not a Pioneer but I do assure you—"

"Peace!" He held up his hands. "Take it back. I was only thinking I could take you, then come back —"

"That'd be silly. If you're going to finish those reports tonight you can't afford the time."

"I wish you didn't have to go."

"Penalty of having friends. You give them the right to call on you for help. Janet would do the same for us. Also, with the place to yourself you'll get done sooner."

She opened the closet, lifted out her leather coat, slid into it, tied the belt. Pulled on her gloves. Held out her hand, palm up. "Key."

"Yes." He unclipped their jet key, folded her fingers round it. "It's the machine I'm worrying about, of course."

"Of course."

His hand moved up her sleeve, slid round her waist, drew her closer, tighter.

"It's got such a wonderful body."

"You like it?"

"I'm crazy about it. Take good care of it. Bring it back as perfect as it is now."

She nuzzled against him. "If I hadn't promised Janet —"

"If —"

"But I'll be back."

"I'll be waiting. To continue this discussion. Unfinished business."

"To be dealt with at our next meeting. I'll be at your service, darling."

She went out laughing.

He stood at the window, looking out and up. His eyes saw nothing except the black night, but in his mind he could watch her take the jet up from the roof to the proper traffic height, move by the ground beacons to the nearest lane entry, and go.

He smiled, and walked into the living room, sat down, took out his pen.

Time—nineteen hours. Valerie wouldn't be back until after breakfast at the earliest. More likely mid-day. Depending on when George got home. It was unlucky that an emergency should have developed on the site where George's firm had a contract a day or so before the baby was due, but there it was. Just one of those things.

"Of course," Valerie had said instantly when George had called them. "I'll go over to Janet, and stay the night. It doesn't put us out at all. In fact, it's a good thing. Eric's got some paper work he must finish. He'll get along quicker with me out of the way. You carry on, and don't worry. Janet'll be fine."

He and Valerie would be god parents soon. Then, someday, they'd tell George and Janet it was their turn. Now that he'd made up his mind to turn down the Star 23 opening, there wasn't any reason why they should delay. Valerie said she wanted children.

Did he? He wanted hers. He wanted a girl like Valerie. But she'd be like him also. Was it true that girls took after their fathers, and vice versa. Wonder what sort of a father he'd make? Bit frightening that. It was a responsibility.

When Valerie came back he'd bring it up. Casually. The way they were, their happiness in each other, they mustn't spoil that. Not that there was anything which could. A child, children, could only make things stronger, deeper.

They were lucky. There couldn't be another couple, anywhere, who were luckier than they were.

He mustn't sit dreaming. He'd got to finish those reports. He glanced again at his watch, felt guilty at the time he'd been doing nothing, took up his pen.

He got down to work, made progress. Until the communicator blurred. He got up in mild annoyance. Who could that be?

It was Janet.

"I *do* apologise. I know it's silly of me. But Valerie did say she'd be here early."

"She hasn't arrived? But she left an hour ago."

"Eric!"

"Hold it." He cut her short. "Could be a dozen reasons. I'll check. Call you back."

"You don't think—?"

"No! Look, if Val turns up before I call back, dial me immediately. Right?"

"Yes. Yes. It's all my fault. If anything has happened, I'll never forgive myself."

"Nothing's happened, Janet. Don't go upsetting yourself. I'll cut off now."

Call Traffic Control. If anything has happened, they'll know. If someone's crashed!

God, don't let it be that. Or, if it is, don't let it be bad. Don't let anything have happened to Valerie.

Dial.

That was the entrance bell. Move! Move, man. That'll be Valerie. Someone's brought her home.

He opened the door.

"Mr. Summers?" the patrol officer asked.

Don't say it! Not—Valerie. But he is saying it. As kindly as he can. Like a brother. Because it's sad news to have to bring.

Valerie, with her long legs, and the way her upper lip wrinkles when she smiles. "I'll be waiting," he'd said. "How long will you wait, sweetheart?" she'd said. "I'll wait," he'd told her. "However long it is." How long would he have to wait now?

"She wouldn't have felt anything, Mr. Summers." Who said that? The patrol officer had said it.

But she'd still have known. For that second, or part of a second, she'd have known. "Were you afraid, darling?" he asked her in his mind. "Where are you now?"

"Is there anyone you'd like to have come round?" the patrol officer was asking. "Anyone who should know?"

There was Janet. I must tell the officer. That my wife was on her way to Janet. Because of her condition, because George couldn't come home. I said I'd call Janet back. But I can't tell her what's happened, can I? Not with her child coming.

"Leave that to us, Mr. Summers. We'll take care of that." The patrol officer was like a father.

He wouldn't ever be a father now. Because George was going to be a father, and Valerie had died going to sit with Janet. All he could ever be now was a godfather.

"Take good care of that body. I'll wait. We've got some unfinished business to discuss." Unfinished business. That's what it would be until the day he died.

It's better to have loved, and lost,

Than never to have loved at all.

Was it? Would he ever feel that? When the memory of her faded.

That was just about the most horrible thought that could come into his mind. That Valerie could grow dim. Helen hadn't grown dim, nor Chloe. Because the men who had loved them were gifted, could keep them alive for ever. But he wasn't gifted. So Valerie would fade, even for him. That was more unjust than killing her had been.

Star 23, here I come. You're not standing in my way now, darling. I don't have to worry about the conditions for you now. I'm free. I can go, and do a job. Help to make a new world habitable. So that other men, when we've finished, can take their wives there, and not worry that Star 23 will kill them.

Will there be any satisfaction when that time comes?

It had been seventeen years ago that he had asked himself that question. Today, asking the same question, he had to confess that there was satisfaction. They'd knocked a world into shape. They'd done what they had been sent to do. Valerie didn't come into it. Not as a person. But as a drive (at the beginning it had been as a frenzy) forcing the pace, wanting to get himself annihilated. Then, when he had continued to survive, when Star 23 had refused to kill him, the drive had carried him on, remorselessly. So that, eventually, somehow, he identified the conditions he fought with those which had murdered her.

Looking back, he could see how everything stemmed from her. More accurately, from his attitude to her loss. It was this which had preserved him where others, equally strong but lacking his passion, had been washed away. He had kept his feet, and he had climbed. Pioneer, First Class; Senior

Pioneer; Senior Administrator. His career was a success. He could recognise the irony of this.

He could recognise the change in himself also. At thirty-seven he accepted responsibility. What *he* wanted wasn't so important as what the job demanded. A man must armour his heart and his mind, and go forward. Because fate respected no dreams, no personal wishes.

If you ate your heart out no one else knew it. You did what you were called to do, and you did it as well as a man could. If you did that, there was nothing could hurt you. Because you'd developed a strength you'd never had before. You'd been stripped bare, and hammered, and shaped for a purpose, and put to work, and you hadn't broken or been blunted. This was your justification and your satisfaction. There wasn't anything else.

Would he return to Star 23 when his period of leave was over, he wondered. He thought back to the beginning of the job. The hacking, clearing, burning, building; the cataclysms destroying their efforts, and the re-building after. The different ecology, more subtle in its dangers. A man died here, another died there, and from each death they had learned. They identified each variant killer by the name of its victim, Smith's Bug, Luigi's Fever, and found a counter. All these things had been titanic enough to hold him.

Would the smoothing and polishing which were what were needed now be strong enough to draw him back? On Earth, one took civilisation for granted. Would he resent it coming here? He hadn't made up his mind on that.

He was certain only on one point. If he returned, he'd come back alone.

She hadn't grown dim. True, he didn't lie awake at night any longer, feeling that he would choke, burst, fly apart, disintegrate. He'd learned to live with her not being there. That wasn't the same as living without her. She was still alive. Somewhere. Circumstances forced them to live apart, but they would come together again. Somewhere. Eternity was a long time, and this separation was only temporary. God wasn't a sadist.

People were though, insensibly. Like Janet, when she'd wanted to name her daughter Valerie. Fortunately, George had put his foot down, and they'd called the baby Annabelle after some relation.

He hadn't stood as godfather. But he'd developed into an honorary uncle, a person who sent presents, and wrote occasional letters, cheerful, remote letters, enclosing a postal draft. The regulations laid it down that home leave had to be taken every so often. He'd come back twice. On those visits he had taken the kid out, the sort of excursions uncles do to perfection. Patiently he'd answered the sort of questions a child asks a favourite uncle.

"What do you do on Star 23, Uncle Eric? If I came to Star 23 would I have to stay inside the base all the time? Next time you come back to Earth, Uncle Eric, will you take me back to Star 23 with you?"

Not that she was a child any longer. She was seventeen. Probably he wouldn't recognise her.

"We'll pick you up in the jet at the space port," George had written. "I hope you won't find it difficult to recognise us. If you see two baby elephants advancing on you that'll be Janet and me. Annabelle's changed a lot also, since you were here last. I'd better warn you that you'll be in for a surprise when you see her."

How difficult would he find it when he stayed the first week of his leave with them as he had promised? Picking up some old threads, and carefully avoiding others. Living in the same house as the girl who, indirectly, had killed his darling. How about her feelings? No, that did not apply. She had never known the details. Valerie's death had never touched her. George had been very careful about that.

"Making too much of it," he rebuked himself. "It never was anything but the business of the name, and they didn't go on with that. Annabelle will be a person in her own right, with her own interests, and I won't be more than a friend of her parents. I'll be someone of a different generation. She and her friends will be polite to me, and that's all. I won't really register. And that's just as it should be."

Nevertheless, throughout the passage to Earth, the thought persisted. That, in some way he could not define, the tragedy was going to be reopened. Through Annabelle. It did not make sense. All the same, he could not rid himself of the idea.

There was a hold-up on the last leg. That didn't help. He could feel himself getting more and more edgy.

"If I were a cat," he thought, "I'd be prowling up and

down, spitting. Take a grip on yourself, man. You're not the psychic type. Never were. So stop behaving like a neurotic spinster. It'll probably be as dull as any other reunion. By the end of the week they'll be as glad to be shot of you as you'll be to get off on your own again."

But the feeling was not to be denied so easily. It insisted on being heard, forced him into having to think out a rational reason for rejecting it.

The announcement that passengers for Earth, Flight Seven, should proceed to Gate B came while he was still probing for the answer. Abstractedly he followed the other travellers, went aboard, and took his seat. They detached from Luna Satellite, purred across the gap, and docked at North Atlantic Satellite One. Throughout the run he stayed slumped in his seat. But if his body seemed inert, his thoughts were running at high pressure.

He transferred to the ferry plying between the space station and Earth's surface automatically. All his concentration was for the battle in his mind, the conflict which had come upon him suddenly. But the seeds of it had germinated long before.

Seeds of rage and resentment against fate, and the instruments of fate. Against Janet for calling Valerie out. Against Annabelle who was the cause. If it were not for Annabelle his darling would not have died. Annabelle was to blame that Valerie was dead.

Emotion erupted, buffeted him. Spewed up from where he had buried it, swirled over him, tore at him.

"They pretend to be your friends," the thoughts pounded. "They called themselves that. Only so they could use you. There was no need for anyone to hold Janet's hand. Anyway, she could have asked a neighbour. It was selfishness to make Valerie come. Janet never cared that it was her fault that Valerie died. All she ever thought about was herself, and the child who was an extension of herself. Why should you continue to shield the child? It's no more than justice that it should be told that her life was bought. She should know the cost, and who paid it. What right has she to be carefree and gay at Valerie's expense? "

He held on to the arms of his seat, fighting against the poisoned foulness vomiting from the geyser of hate which he

had suppressed for seventeen years. Which he had thought had seeped away, harmlessly, been drained, been cleansed.

He had to defeat it. Because if he did not it would destroy him. It would destroy the philosophy he had struggled to attain, the peace he had achieved. He would not win now by merely denying these emotions. That was what he had done before. He must not make the same mistake again.

Thirty miles above the surface. Twenty. Fifteen. The flashing indicator panel accused him. "You should have faced up to this before. Not shelved it to the last moment.

"You've known about Annabelle for seventeen years. You've known that this resentment was still there. You did nothing about it."

He forced himself to think rationally, leaning against each consecutive idea, forcing it through the sludge of self-pity. Hating himself because he knew now how weak he was. He had thought he was his own master. He was as callow as he had ever been.

He didn't dare stay in their home even for one day. He would have to make some excuse. Pretend there'd been a message waiting for him at the satellite, orders to report immediately. Then, once he had got away—keep away. Get right out of their lives, and stay out. Not even write. Make sure this filth never touched them. Never hurt Annabelle.

He did not realise, until they touched down, that he had been sitting with his body rigid, braced against the mental forces sucking him down.

They landed in storm, the blacked out sky slashed by lightning, tearing with thunder. Water made bridgeheads on the concrete. The buses carrying them to the reception buildings flakked up spray which glinted in the arc-lit night.

He came through the barrier, swung his glance round for George and Janet who were to pick him up. Get it over quickly.

He did not see them.

The storm. It must have affected conditions on the air lanes, slowed everyone down.

But—he was late also. Some of the time lost at Luna Satellite had been made up, but not all of it. However much Traffic Control restricted private flying under storm conditions George and Janet should still have been here before he arrived. But they weren't.

What had gone wrong?

He put his case down, slowly, carefully. He straightened himself, took out his handkerchief. His hands were sticky. He wiped them, slowly, deliberately killing time.

He'd have to ask if there were a message for him. He was suddenly afraid that there might not be a message.

Was history repeating itself? Seventeen years ago a messenger had come through the storm to tell him his wife was dead. Tonight—?

Was this the real reason for his uneasiness? That, somehow, his unconscious mind had looked into the future, had seen tragedy ahead. Had used its only weapons, image and emotion, to try to turn him from his path. And had failed as it was bound to fail. Because man was not a player, no matter how he deluded himself. Man was only a counter. Fate was the croupier who spun the wheel, and wielded the rake as well.

Had three more counters been swept off the board this night?

A hand touched his arm, and he turned.

Not three counters. Two?

"Annabelle."

Not a child now. An adult. A modern, gleaming, slickly booted. She was as tall as Valerie had been. When Valerie had gone away from him she had been wearing a leather coat. Annabelle was wearing a similar coat, belted around just such a slim waist. She was as beautiful as Valerie had been. It was almost as though Valerie had come back. One part of him was grateful for this, and the other was not. She was so like his darling. Except that Valerie had gone away laughing and Annabelle was grave, unsmiling, troubled.

He knew why. He saw again the expression on the face of the officer who had brought him word that night long ago. Who had been gentle with him. He must be very gentle with her. "Tell me," he said.

"How much do you know?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Nothing. Except, all the way over, I felt something. Trying to get through." She nodded. But she did not speak, and he went on. "When I didn't see George and Janet, I thought —"

"Nothing has happened to them," she said. "They haven't changed."

"They're well?"

"Perfectly. Safe *and* sane." She half smiled. "*They* haven't had any feelings."

Not two counters. None. Or—none so far. So far? The sacrifice was still in the future. But for how long? And who? Annabelle? Through him. He could see the pattern.

She had come here because of him. Whatever path she took from this point, she was vulnerable. From this point of space and time where they had come together, she lived only until the gods tired of the suspense. Because that was the pattern being repeated. Through him. From the moment Valerie died, and she was born, Annabelle's fate had been tied to his.

She was so like Valerie. The same style of looking at one, the same expectant air, the same radiance. It was pitiful that she must die.

"I was late getting here," she was saying. "But—I knew that that was right. I knew you'd wait. Whatever happened, however long it was, I knew you'd wait."

"I'd wait," he heard himself answer. "I'd always wait for you." That was what he had told Valerie before she died. That was how he must answer now.

"I've waited also. I didn't know why I was waiting. Only, inside me, I knew there was something. Although it was always vague. Until today."

"Go on," he said. He took her hands, held them.

"Yes. Today, though. I knew. There was something missing. Something I could only find with you. Which you had to find also. Something we'd started, and never finished because we hadn't been ready."

"Unfinished business. To be discussed at our next meeting." He said the words very quietly.

This was what his subconscious had seen, for which it had tried to prepare him. Which his rational mind was not willing to accept, had fought against. Advancing psychological interpretations to explain away what was outside its experience. Clouding the issue with philosophical concepts barren and devoid of hope.

But life was bigger than the rational mind could encom-

pass. Life was the most precious expression of God, and it was not, could never be wasted.

"This is our next meeting," he said.

"Yes."

He put his arms round her. "There is a place waiting for you on Star 23," he said. "Will you come back with me when I return?"

"That is what I have waited for you to say," she answered.

She smiled, her upper lip wrinkling as he remembered it did. She said the final words. "I am at your service, darling."

clifford c. reed.

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As the tempo of modern living increased beyond human imagination, Gregwold evolved an interesting theory to account for people who apparently disappeared and only returned in a ghost-like form. His theory was a little too unrealistic for the majority of young people, however.

the unremembered

by edward mackin

Mrs. Gregwold buttoned the auto-chef, and turned to her husband who was sitting near the picture-window, gazing out over the Levels.

"Tea's on, Timothy," she said, as the meal rattled out on to the service table.

Timothy Gregwold got to his feet, and stretched his limbs, grunting as he did so.

"Those sporter-flivs got faster all the time," he remarked. "I just saw two playing skeet across the Levels. Must have been doing all of three-hundred. Beats me what these youngsters use for brains these days. They're speed mad."

He sat down at the table, and looked at the processed stew, and at the price on the credit tag.

"One of them crashed over on Tenth last night," his wife told him. "It killed three people and a labrador dog. A lovely animal. I saw its picture in the News Flash."

"A point-one increase," frowned Mr. Gregwold. He examined the other dishes. "Fruit's up, too," he grumbled. "If this goes on we'll be raiding our capital."

"Its the Rejuvenation Clinics," his wife said. "They're costing more to run, I believe."

"Oh, we musn't knock them, must me?" he said, sarcastically. "Where would we be without them?"

"Dust hath closed Helen's eye," she quoted, vaguely.

"Two-hundred years dead." He dug at the stew. "I sometimes wonder why we bother, though."

She sat opposite him, and unwrapped the ready-buttered bread, arranging the pieces carefully on a plate. "You know why," she said, quietly. "One of *them* was here today."

He swallowed some of the food, and looked uneasy. "Here? You mean outside the flat?"

She nodded. "I was going to have a chat with Mrs. Benz. She gets very lonely, you know, being on her own. Well, I opened the door and he was standing there. I felt as though I should know him; but I didn't. And then he'd gone. He was near the end of the corridor, walking away from me."

"No time interval?"

"You know how it is. He was by the door, and then he wasn't. I've been trying to think ever since about what he looked like; but I can't."

"I know. He looked like everyone you ever knew, and nobody in particular."

"Oh, someone in particular, I think; but it was hazy."

They finished the meal in silence, and when she pressed the appropriate button the centre of the table with the remnants of the meal rolled silently back into the wall and disappeared. He turned in his chair, and switched on the video. After idly watching the images form on the mock stage he switched off again, and sat with his back to it.

"No washing up," he mused, looking at the early sky-ads flare up over Ford Capitol on East Twelfth Level, which was the highest they'd got. "No rattle of dishes, no smell of cooking. I've lived too long."

She came and sat next to him, moving her chair through the floor slots. "Stew doesn't agree with you," she said. "Maybe you should have milk and bananas odd days."

He shook his head. "Not for me. You never see a real banana these days. They're always ready-skinned and in one of those cute little plastic jackets. What was wrong with the original skin? I'll tell you what. They couldn't charge it, that's what. They're pre-package mad these days. Oranges peeled so you can see the fruit, all yellow and slimy. And those apples, sans peel, sans core, and sans taste. Or maybe

you want a fresh egg so you can go old-fashioned and actually beat it up yourself in your milk. Well, the machine will humour you, if you press the right button. But what do you get? You get the palest of pale yellow eggs in a transparent little doodah. It's indecent! An egg should be in a shell."

She smiled at him indulgently, and switched off the table light. It was silly to waste credits. Timothy, it seemed, was in one of his grumbling moods. These were usually triggered off by indigestion, and covered everything from food and other Government shortcomings to the putrid programmes on the video, which he never looked at anyway.

"Perhaps you should have a talk with the hens," she chaffed. "They could be eating plastic instead of grit."

"Hens?" He sounded as though he couldn't believe his ears. "Hens? Get up to date, woman, for heaven's sake! You know what? I saw an egg production unit once. It's just a damn great automated hell! There were three -thousand hens there; but you couldn't see a single one. Not one. They were de-squawked and built in. Machines of flesh. Just parts of a larger machine, and each one fed at precise intervals with measured quantities of food through the neck. What does a hen want with head or eyes? It doesn't need to peck grit either. The soft eggs drop into neat, little plastic containers, which are whipped away by the belt to be sealed and stamped.

"When the production figures decline for any unit it is automatically replaced, and still you don't see the hen. Just a metal box, wired and tubed, and inside is a legless, featherless, headless creature; a bit of equipment that wore out. So, I don't like eggs without the shells."

She was horrified. "You're making it up," she said. "No-one would be so wicked." She tried to think when she had last seen a shell-egg; but gave it up. "Someone should do something about it," she decided.

He nodded. "That's up to the youngsters. But they won't do anything. They have that mindless look about them."

"The young always seem like that to the old. They'll be all right. You see."

"Maybe they'll blow us all up," he said, with a grin, "and go off somewhere else to live on an acre apiece and a cow. By God, if only I were young again! That's what I'd do. I'd blow it so high it would rain plascrete and people

for three days solid. What good are we doing? What's the use of it all?"

"You've been missing attendances at the clinic," she said. "You shouldn't do that. You don't want to be like . . . like . . ."

"One of those," he finished for her. "No I don't. When I feel it coming on I'm going to walk off the Level."

She looked at him a trifle anxiously. The tell-tale signs of neglect were there on his thin, almost waxen face, as though a warm hand had been passed over the image of a man, erasing his personality.

"You'll really have to go to the vats very soon, Timothy," she urged. "It must be three years since you were there last."

"Five years and some odd days," he corrected her. "You could do with some treatment yourself."

She nodded, brightly, and essayed a brief smile. "I'm going this afternoon," she said.

"Forget it," he told her. "I went along yesterday. The vats are closed for extensive alterations, or so the notice says. They've been closed for over a week."

Her eyes widened with fear. "You mean you can't get treatment until the stupid alterations are finished?"

"That's just an excuse," he said. "It's all over the city that the Lunar strike petered out. The total stock of selenite could be heaped on a dinner plate. Process that and you are left with maybe a teaspoon of catalyst-49; just about enough for three full treatments. I videoed the Appointments Bureau six times before I finally got through. I was told that they are only doing emergencies; but my name would be placed on the priority list. They'll get in touch with me in due course, I don't think. It's my guess that the emergencies are really private stockholders."

He shifted his position so that he faced the video, and snapped the News-Flash button. A smooth-faced announcer with a little brush moustache was halfway through an item on traffic casualties. Timothy switched off.

"Fifty-per-cent up on last week's," he remarked. "With the birthrate falling the way it is, and the youngsters killing themselves off wholesale, this will be a world of ghosts before another century has passed. Unless, of course, Professor Gorgon is successful with his artificial womb. In that case

we can look forward to having a race of zombies to nod at. Those of us who are left, that is. With a bit of luck we'll be dead by then, though."

"You shouldn't talk like that," she said, uneasily.

"Better that than being a kind of wraith, blocked off from both life and death, and existing in some sort of Limbo. I've been thinking about it a lot lately. There's not much else to do, is there, at our age? Anyway, I've come up with a kind of theory." He drew an imaginary line on the table with his forefinger. "The Life Force carrier wave," he explained. "Now we'll have some modulation." His finger traced this up and down and along the carrier wave. "You know what that is? It's a speech pattern wave. It's the *Word*. A single word spoken by the Almighty." He placed an imaginary dot near where he thought he'd drawn the base line. "A point of life," he said, while she watched with a faint, puzzled, frown; but the frown was for the closed Rejuvenation Clinics. Worrying about this she hardly heard what he was saying, and wouldn't have understood, anyway.

He gave a quick side glance to ensure that he had her attention, and then tapped the dot again. "A point of life," he repeated, "which moves gradually upwards and forwards as the creature matures. The whole wave train feeds it at first, and then it begins to miss the shorter peaks, which is when time seems to be going faster, and then faster still as we grow older, and older. When we are really old only the longer peaks feed life into us. Normally, around about this time we'd be old and tottery, and a fair target for everything lethal; in fact, a living write-off."

"Yes," she said, quickly, as he paused and looked at her again.

"Nowadays, however," he went on, and allowed himself a sardonic smile, "the catalyst treatment can pull you back; but if, after a great many years, you stop the treatment what happens? What happens is that you shoot up and away from the Life Force modulation, if you see what I mean, until just the tip of an occasional peak fires your conscious mind, and then only the tip of an exceptionally long peak. Eventually—we don't know when because we don't know how long the longest peaks are—we should just fade into oblivion.

"As it is," he said, seeing it all in his mind's eye, and searching for the means to describe it, "there is a period

when we are just asprawl in the great gaps between the longer peaks, and during that time we aren't here at all. We? I mean *they*, of course. Those poor ghosts we see all around us these days, and almost recognise. They exist only in spasms, and even though we may have known them we find it impossible to recollect anything about them. Oh, they are never completely forgotten, just unremembered. They are beyond help, and too insubstantial even for Death to claim."

"You sound just like the man on the video," she said, contriving a smile. "He was on last week sometime, and he was explaining it all with diagrams and things, and squiggly bits that didn't make any kind of sense at all. But he said that the apparitions—he called them that—he said the apparitions would increase; but not to be frightened because they were harmless."

"Did he?" he said, and seemed disconcerted. "I didn't see it," he added; "but I heard someone talking about it, and it set me thinking . . ."

There was a haziness about him. She began to think of the dog that had been killed in the crash, and wondered why she should be more concerned about an animal than the human beings killed at the same time. It was its essential innocence, of course. It wasn't in any way concerned with the mechanical muddle that Man had got himself into.

She looked at the empty chair next to her, and something flickered in her mind, some vague memory that wouldn't reveal itself. It was almost as though someone should have been sitting there with her. Nonsense, of course, she told herself. There had never been anyone.

She got to her feet slowly, almost painfully, and looked out of the picture window. Just below, on the near Level someone was looking up at her. She wondered who it could be, and decided it looked like the man she had seen standing outside the door of the flat earlier that day. Then he was gone, to reappear further down the Level. It was one of *them* she thought, and felt troubled.

She looked around the room, and a little frown creased her rapidly ageing features. There seemed to be something missing somehow. She sighed.

"I'll have to get a little dog," she said, aloud.

On Level 17, East Block, where the flat building that housed the Rejuvenation Clinic was situated there was a small crowd of people of both sexes assembled in a rough queue. Timothy Gregwold joined them.

"What goes?" he asked the man in front. "Have they got the vats working?"

The other shook his head. "They're issuing euthanasia permits."

So it had come to that. Timothy looked around at the busy Levels; at the tall buildings, the cloud-toppers, piercing the huge layered structures, and at the linking flyovers and pedways, bright with the late spring sunshine. He watched the hordes of jets, and hovercabs, and the stripped-down sporter-flivs darting like dragonflies between the shining facade of glass and plascrete and, suddenly, for the first time in years he realised, with a little tug at the heart, that it meant something to him. He didn't want to leave it. *Idiot*, he thought. You sentimental old idiot! There's no room here for you. Your world is dead and buried. All this belongs to the younger ones, God help them!

A young couple passed, arms around each other, and glancing towards the queue laughed loudly. The young man said something that Timothy took to be derisive, and they laughed again; but the oldsters queueing for death ignored them. They had passed the point of no return, and felt themselves already dead.

Timothy Gregwold turned on his heel and walked away. He felt that the important thing now was not to panic, and to try and preserve some semblance of human dignity. *He* wasn't queuing for permission to die. If he reached the point where it was either that or worse then he would do it in his own way, and under his own steam. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed a tall, wavering shape that shifted its position constantly over to his left. One of *them*, he thought. A lonely ghost looking for solace.

On a sudden impulse he walked to the edge of the Level, and looked over the parapet. Here there was a sheer drop of nearly a thousand feet. He put one leg over and sat on the smooth plascrete. Then he tried to bring the other leg over to join it preparatory to a plunge that would take him into an abyss of fear and pain and then oblivion; but he couldn't do it.

"Haven't got the nerve," he said at last.

A uniformed patrolman came over to him, hand resting lightly on his stun gun. "Not that way, old-timer," he said. "It makes such a mess. What's the problem? Credits or the clinic?"

Timothy brought his leg back over the parapet and stood up. "Neither," he said, bitterly. "Just lack of guts."

He walked away. The patrolman's mocking voice came after him. "Try a Mother Reilly's special. That's our problem just now."

He was referring to a drink consisting of three parts of cheap wine with one part of pure alcohol and a dash of wood spirit. It was much favoured by the city's poorer drunks and the flotsam that could be found in every niche and doorway on almost every Level despite the Government's massive welfare programmes. The trouble was, Timothy reflected, that most of the money was being siphoned off and into the pockets of a rat pack of professional leeches, and greedy entrepreneurs.

Just the same, he decided, a drink might help at that. In an effort to combat alcoholism and its attendant ills the authorities had opened a number of bars as an experiment. The idea was to wean the bulk of the addicts from the more lethal concoctions. Ironically, they had been taken up by the bored, but respectable strata of society, and no member of the submerged tenth would have dared to show his nose in any of them, even supposing he could pay the exorbitant prices now demanded.

He called in at *Randy's Bar*, and asked the white-coated barman for a double Scotch. He drank this off almost in a gulp, while the man passed his credit card through the register, and ordered another.

The barman looked sympathetic. "They'll be shipping a load in any day now," he reassured Timothy.

Timothy gave a wry smile. "It shows, huh?" he said.

"I've had over a dozen in this morning all worried to hell about the same thing, the Clinic shut-down."

The old man looked around the empty bar. "We must be your only customers," he remarked.

The barman took up a spotless glass and polished it. "It brightens up towards evening," he said. "People calling in on the way home from business mostly; but later on we get

crowded. I have to switch over to auto-service. Can't cope on my own. It makes me wonder sometimes what blessed use I am. The auto could handle it right through."

"The human touch," Mr. Gregwold said, a bit thickly after downing his second double. "This place would be nothing without the human touch. Will you have one with me?"

"Thank you, sir," the barman said. He passed Timothy's card through the register again, and transferred the drink price to his tip credit. Then he poured the double whisky for his customer, and ginger ale for himself out of a similar bottle. "Your good health, sir," he said, "and here's to the Clinics opening again shortly." They drank to that.

"Yes," murmured Timothy to himself, "that's what the whole damn set-up lacks. The human touch." He nodded to the barman. "That's what makes this place such an oasis. I should have come here more often; but now I won't be able to."

"Any day now they'll be shipping it in," said the barman. "You see if they don't."

This time it sounded even less convincing. Timothy shook his head. "The mines are worked out. They were just pockets anyway. The only deliveries still going through are from private stockpiles."

The barman nodded, and began to polish the same glass all over again. "You tumbled to it," he said. "I hear a lot in this bar. People forget you're around when they've had a few. That's what it is, dad. They're slinging in the private stuff because that's all there is. These characters were allowed to buy themselves in to ease Government expenditure, and they were able to stockpile about twenty per cent of the raw selenite. On top of this they took ten per cent of Earth deliveries in lieu of freightage for their own stock. Now these boys are the only ones with any selenite. Only they're not selling. They're keeping it for their old age, and their children's old age, if they have any children. Yeah, that's it; but what can you do about it?"

"Get drunk, maybe," said Timothy. "That's about all."

The barman put the glass under the counter somewhere. "What about a massive dose of anabolic steroids? I've heard they're treating some people with that and a few other drugs. They used to get some pretty spectacular results with

those things years ago." He wiped his hands on the cloth, and hung it up.

"I'm past that," Timothy said. "Long past it." He drank the rest of the whisky and slid the glass across the counter. The barman looked at him, pityingly. As he moved away the room shifted slightly, and he was outside without knowing how he got there.

"Just missed a couple of low peaks," he told himself, fear gripping him. "No need to get panicky, though. There's still a chance."

He saw the same patrolman approaching him, and turned and walked the other way. He was staggering a bit because of the unaccustomed drinking bout; but looking back he saw that the patrolman had stopped to watch a helicab, which was coming down in a restricted parkway. He moved off purposefully towards it, and Timothy began to run towards the edge of the Level. Without any hesitation this time he threw himself over the low parapet and fell, turning over and over, to a projecting lower Level.

Then, miraculously, he was walking away unhurt. It had happened after all. He had been just too late, and he was between the peaks, a reluctant immortal. He felt the hard laughter inside him. Nothing could kill him now.

After this he just seemed to wander about in a soundless world, which came to noisy life in occasional bursts when he hit an exceptionally long peak. He had a sense of timelessness, and was conscious of being everywhere at once: outside the Rejuvenation Clinics; looking up at his apartment; gazing at strange people, whom he felt he should know, and seeing only vague recognition mixed with fear in their faces; walking along all the Levels; standing in all the bars, and peering at everyone from everywhere in the city. This awful ubiquity filled him with black horror.

Sometimes he was aware of being outside the solar system altogether, journeying through the galaxy with the ice-cold radiance of the unblinking stars his only company, and this was worse. His personality was reduced to shards and then to dust, and the dust scattered over the cosmic wastes, and along the star trails. He saw the myriad planets teeming with strange life forms, experienced the impact of a million alien cultures, and was afraid in every part of him.

The last enemy was not that which he had expected. It was an awareness of the white hot hate of Truth. Not man's truth; but the truth that was the original Chaos. The truth that he had always rejected with all of his being; for man had risen above this, moulding it to his own image and burying, in his subconscious, what wouldn't fit.

Suddenly, and quite without warning, he beheld the *real*. It was like the lifting of a third curtain, the truth behind the truth behind the truth. The glimpse that he had was of pure beauty, terrible to behold. He fled across the galaxies and, with each screaming mote of his being, prayed that it would end. Nothing now to be added or taken away, oh Lord, he prayed except awareness. Let me not be forever and forever . . .

Yet, somehow, it was borne upon him that it could not end like this. It was the final disintegration before the ultimate integration. Gradually, as the realisation came the fear went, and then he *knew*. He was an integral part of a multi-dimensional pattern; a part of everyone who had gone before and who would come after, before man even and after man. That terrifying ubiquity, fading now that he had become orientated to something greater than self, was a manifestation of the many facets of that part of the universal mind that he had occupied as an entity, and enclosed.

After the first death there can be no other; only the scattered light returning to its source. He felt a drawing-in of his fragmented personality, and he was content. Somewhere at the centre of this spiritual lodestone, serene and ineffable, would be the Word before it was made flesh . . . the healing Word . . . the world's end, and a new beginning. . . .

edward mackin.



For every action there is a reaction and this holds true of man's nature just as much as it does in science. In the following story the question basically is, when does the hunted become the hunter ?

jetway 75

by william spencer

The small boy hunted through the pile of toys eagerly, tossing teddy bears and nuclear submarines to one side, scattering play-bricks noisily. From the bottom of the pile he unearthed a shiny model jetcar, and waved it triumphantly in the air.

Hogben, watching him closely through a one-way window in the wall of the psychomotive laboratory, nodded with satisfaction. Every day that week the boy had chosen the jetcar—the same orange and yellow jetcar.

Sheeee, sheeee! squealed the boy, imitating the ear-piercing noise of a real jetcar. He made the model flash round his head in gleaming arcs, slicing the air.

Sheeee!

Hogben, concealed behind the one-way glass, wrote busily in his notepad. Then he looked up again, his little eyes twinkling sharply behind the polished lenses of his rimless spectacles, eager not to miss anything. A few more weeks of watching, a few more significant incidents, and he would have enough material for his report.

He watched the boy as he made the toy skim at lightning speed above the surface of the big play-table. A real jetcar, of course, would stay airborne most of the time, at least

thirty feet up. That anyway was the legal requirement—often flouted.

Now the boy seemed to be tiring of his toy. He brought it in to a pancake landing on the table-top, then put his hands in his pockets and began to look around aimlessly.

With an air of indifference he stirred the pile of toys with his foot. By accident he uncovered a large shapeless mass of multi-coloured modelling clay. Casually he picked it up. Then his interest obviously quickened again, as he began to knead the clay thoughtfully between his hands.

Hogben twisted his propelling pencil to extrude a little more lead, and wrote carefully on his notepad.

Puts down jetcar. Takes up modelling clay.

He looked again through the one-way window at the child in the psychomotive laboratory.

Forms sphere 3 cm. diameter.

The four-year-old boy had hitched up his short trousers with a small grubby hand and gone to work purposefully on the modelling clay. He carefully rolled out a ball. Then a sausage-shaped lump. Then four smaller lumps.

With all the concentration and satisfaction of a Michaelangelo creating his David, the boy assembled the lumps into a rough simulacrum of the human figure. Then, putting his tongue out of the corner of his mouth, and bending his head sideways, he pierced eyes and a mouth into the head of the manikin with a sharp scrap of wood.

Makes man, wrote Hogben in his notepad, with equal satisfaction.

This was getting interesting.

The boy squeezed the manikin against the table-top so that the little creature stood upright. Then he took hold of the plastic model jetcar. The bright colours of the toy flashed as he twirled it in the air above the table-top.

Sheeee, sheeee! squealed the boy, imitating the jetcar noise again.

Sheeeeeeeee!—

He brought the model jetcar sweeping down in a shining arc. *Sheeee.* The nose of the model struck the manikin in the chest, knocking him over. The clay head fell off and rolled across the table.

Sheeee, sheeee! The boy swept the jetcar up in a long arc, swinging high. His eyes were alight with glee.

Hogben, behind the one-way glass, nodded sagely. He smoothed the notepad with the edge of his left hand and wrote in his neat, small handwriting, *Destroys man.*

Normal healthy aggressive tendencies.

Hogben closed the notebook with a snap and fastened it with a rubber band. He pressed the button of the intercom.

"All right, Nurse," he said, "we'll end the session there for this morning. Take little Bobby back to the creche."

Hogben sat back in his swivel chair, considering his latest findings, pigeonholing them in his memory.

He became aware once more of the dull pain at the back of his head, the pain caused by an inescapable background of noise. Insistent, insidious, the penetrating whine of Jetway 75 filled every corner of the building. The vast concrete ribbons of the Jetway, one of the huge metropolitan tangle of freeways and flyovers, ran barely three hundred feet away from the spot where he was sitting. No soundproofing could keep the din out.

The muffled scream of jets filtered through the plastic shell of the building. Through the layers of fluffed fibre, the cavities of expanded plastic foam, the decibel traps. It was impossible to stop that noise.

The answer, thought Hogben grimly, is a counterblast of some other kind of noise. He reached out a prodding forefinger and snapped on the TV built into the end of his desk.

The semiconductor screen glowed instantly to life, catching the bland face of the announcer in mid-sentence:

"... said that yesterday's casualties amount to 85 dead and 323 injured. This is fifteen per cent above the figures for the metropolitan jetways on the same day last year ..."

Homicidal maniacs, Hogben muttered inwardly.

"... the rising toll on the jetways continues to cause grave concern. The Minister exhorts all citizens to exercise the greatest possible ..."

Oh, what's the good of talking? Hogben asked himself.

There followed the usual sequence of horror quickies, showing the mangled debris of piled-up jetcars, occasionally with an inert arm or leg protruding graphically from the wreckage.

Why do they do it? thought Hogben.

" . . . and with immediate effect the following intersections are designated as danger-zones :

" Intersection AP-23-44.

" Intersection KF-27-63.

" Intersection JY "

Hogben snapped off the TV impatiently.

He caught sight of the clock on the wall. It was time to go. With the familiar feeling of hopelessness and nausea, Hogben faced the journey back to his apartment on the fringes of the metropolis. It was a sickening prospect.

He let himself out through the door of his room, locking it behind him, then walked slowly down the long corridor, and through the swing doors at the head of the escalator shaft. Down the brilliantly lit stairway he rode to ground level, and dismounted in the entrance hall.

The noise from Jetway 75, ever present, was now menacingly loud. Only a single thickness of wall—the front wall of the building—separated Hogben from the jetway itself, a six-hundred-foot-wide multiple ribbon of concrete with the cars screaming along high above it, riding the shimmering veils of their lift jets.

The end wall of the entrance hall, about twenty feet wide by fifty feet high, was a blank white surface, unpierced by windows. As Hogben gazed at it, he felt he could see it shuddering. Was he imagining it, or was the wall really shivering and trembling under the terrible onslaught of noise from outside?

A single door at the foot of the wall gave access directly onto the jetway. It was of heavy steel, lined with asbestos, thoroughly soundproofed—and tightly closed.

Hogben did not go through this door. Instead he swung left into the men's cloakroom. His locker was at the far end on the right. From inside, Hogben unhooked his heavy jet-suit, and began to struggle into it. It was black, with a dull sheen, and as thick and tough as rhinoceros hide. Inside were fleecy layers of padding and insulation.

He got one leg inside, then the other. Next he pulled up the long zip at the front, all the way to his throat. Then he turned and walked stiffly to the door, pulling on the padded face mask and goggles, clamping the ear plugs carefully into position, adjusting them for maximum effect. You had only

one set of eardrums, and they were worth looking after.

Hogben crossed the entrance hall again, not hearing the clatter that his heavy jetsuit boots made on the marble floor. He was trying hard not to think about what came next, but his heart was pounding nonetheless.

As always, Hogben paused behind the main door, crouching like a sprinter waiting for the starter's pistol, gathering his breath.

With a sudden jerk, he shot back the multiple bolts. Then he was through the door and slamming it behind him.

A wave of heat, blast, fume and noise hit him like a solid wall. It was like opening the hatch of a test bunker where flaring rocket nozzles are blasting at full thrust.

A quick push against the door told him that the catches had dropped and the pneumatic seal inflated, and then he was off. He ran like a rabbit, crouching, keeping close to the long wall of the building, pressing the mask tightly to his face.

It made no difference.

You could smell the fumes still through the multiple layers of filter in the mask. Feel the fumes sucked deep into your lungs, corroding away like an aerosol of sulphuric acid.

The noise still hit you, through ear muffs and plugs, searing away at raw nerve endings inside your head. Hogben knew that. He knew because he made this run, the same run, twice a day. No matter how many times it was repeated, the pain came up freshly every day. That was the way it hit you.

Hogben flattened himself against a wall. A screaming jet-car surged along the nearside lane, rushing apparently straight towards him.

Spreadeagled with fear, he tried to make himself small, insignificant, unnoticed. He felt like a fieldmouse when it sights the swooping hawk making its final run in on the target—himself.

Transfixed, unable to move, he still registered with super-normal clarity what was happening. He could see the shining, bulging, scarlet craft growing bigger in his field of vision millisecond by millisecond. Now he could see, through the crystal quartzglass windscreen, the grinning face of the man at the controls. Hunched forwards, his shoulders tense and massive with the sense of power, the man was gunning his

throttles, blasting with full jet thrust forwards and downwards.

Hogben quivered helplessly with terror.

The jetcar had been fully twenty feet up in the air when he first sighted it. Now it was descending in a smooth fast arc to within six feet of the jetway surface.

The man was deliberately gunning him, Hogben knew that. He knew it as clearly as he could hear the banshee howl of the jet getting fiercer and intolerably louder until the craft loomed monstrous on top of him.

Hogben screwed up his eyes and clamped his hands over his ears as the scream of the craft reached an unthinkable maximum, blotting out all sensation in a torrent of decibels.

The next unimaginable instant it was past and over him, hitting him with the hot spume of gas from the finned heat-exchangers, going away down a tunnel of sound, leaving him quivering and breathless.

It was impossible to believe that the jet had missed him. Yet here he was.

But there was no time to react, no time to think. He had to continue running, frantically pumping his legs, to the end of the block.

He gathered himself and sprinted through the torrent of sound, through the smearing hazy fumes left by hot jet exhausts. The thick mask over his face made running difficult, choked off the air from his lungs.

Not that there was any real air to breathe. A gaseous cocktail of the toxic products of combustion served as the atmosphere. You were supposed to get used to it, supposed not to notice it. Hogben noticed it all right, through his mask, through the layers of absorbent fibre and filtering gauzes.

But now Hogben was concentrating only on running, only on dodging the screaming missiles as they bored along and above the jet way, jostling in split-second manoeuvres for a daredevil's fraction of a second, a nudging lead on the next machine. In the race to shave milliseconds off the time of a run, in the eagerness to exploit the thrusting power of the jets, the pedestrian was an expendable. The cringing, skulking, rabbit-running pedestrian was a kind of vermin, allowed to survive precariously only because his presence on the jetway added to the sport.

Now Hogben saw looming through the haze ahead his immediate goal : a pair of parallel black dotted lines across the scarred white surfaces of the jetway.

Between these lines the walker was supposed to have right of way. The jetcars must keep at least fifty feet of altitude in crossing these lines.

But did they!

Hogben's masked face creased into a sardonic grin as he lunged forward between the dotted lines. There were six lanes to cross, six lanes of twisted grinning terror.

He was across the first, across the second. Running. Scuttling.

Then they saw him.

Saw him, and thrust their throttles forward hard against the stops.

Saw him, and flexed their control columns forwards in near-suicidal dives.

Screaming insanely down from opposing directions, black, silver, gold, purple streaks of jetcar gunned down at him, torturing the air.

Hogben flung himself down, sliding on his elbows, as the leading jet gouged the concrete with its landing skids a few heart-stopping feet away from him. He could almost hear, or imagine, the maniacal laughter of the man at the controls, as the craft clawed its way back into the air on screeching jets.

No doubt Hogben presented rather a comic picture. He did not care. He grovelled and shambled his way rapidly on all fours across the remaining lanes of the jetway. He did not look back as he continued running, crouching almost double. Through the big ferro-concrete gateway. Across the vast half-empty parking lot.

Still he kept running, with a more erect gait, though more slowly. His breath coming now in great shuddering gasps. But he had almost made it.

Then, suddenly, he was there. Home. Safe. Arrived.

He leaned in a state of near-collapse against the glossy flank of the machine, its light-alloy skin resplendent with a burnished blue finish. He patted the jetcar, caressed it, kissed it. His very own. His magnificent chariot. More splendid than any barbarian conqueror's. His stepping stone to more than human greatness.

Now, recovering his breath, he fumbled in his pocket for the magnetic key. The door sprang open with a welcoming gesture. He climbed inside and slammed the door behind him.

He sat triumphant in the control seat and tore off his mask. The air inside the jetcar was sweetly conditioned. He took great reviving lungfuls of it, clearing the acid-clogged tissues of his nose and throat.

Before him, the gleaming chromium controls lay in terraced banks, like the keys of a huge electronic organ. The lucid panorama of the omnivision windscreen lay round his head on all sides. The control column, the throttles, were waiting, sensitively, alertly, for his command.

It felt good. He was ready to go.

As he lightly touched, fondled almost, the starter button, the rotors of the jets whined up the scale. Through the middle register, sweetly. Higher, higher. Until they settled to a controlled scream. But now it was music to Hogben's ear—sweet music.

The thin sonic vibrations took hold of his spine and the base of his brain, and shook them in a fierce two-thousand-cycles-per-second dance. A mad elfin jig, that subtly seized the listener with its spell and rendered him temporarily insane.

But it was a gratifying, megalomaniac insanity that gripped Hogben by the spine. As he edged the throttles forward, he felt the surge of ecstatic glee. His heart went surfriding. The three-ton craft lifted and simultaneously drove forward through the air with an acceleration that gave Hogben a massively satisfying shove in the back. Swoosh!

He was airborne, he was accelerating, no one could stop him.

Let anyone try!

With a grin that showed his teeth, Hogben fish-tailed out on to Jetway 75. His lightning manoeuvre forced two other jetcars to veer crazily aside.

Hogben laughed above the scream of the rotors as he gunned the craft fiercely along the middle lane. The muscles of his jaw tensed, his shoulders hunched forwards against the thrust. He was unrecognisable now as the timid, exposed,

palpitating, runtish creature who short minutes ago had been scuttling for his life across the concrete surfaces.

Then he saw.

A speck in the distance.

A small vulnerable blob of protoplasm in the shape of a man, running, stopping, crouching, grovelling.

A pedestrian!

Hogben gave a whoop of joy.

A snivelling, abject, defenceless pedestrian!

With a bellow of triumph, Hogben eased his control column forward, and slammed the gleaming throttle levers against their stops.

His glistening bullet of a car screamed down through the tortured air like a blue swordfish, homing inexorably on its helpless prey.

This'll teach him to get in my way, thought Hogben as his craft lunged forwards and downwards, threatening to furrow the very surface of the scorched jetway.

Out of my way you vermin.

Here I come!

william spencer.

the literary line-up

Donald Malcolm has the lead novelette next month, in the last of his Planetary Exploration Team's adventures on other worlds. "Beyond the Reach of Storms" (a title taken from a phrase in an Arthur Clarke book) has an intriguing set-up with a doughnut-ringed sun. Impossible? Read Mr. Malcolm's explanation of the possibilities next month. Plus short stories and the final climax of James White's fascinating serial.

Story ratings for No. 136 were:

The Dark Mind, Part 2	-	-	-	-	Colin Kapp
No Ending	-	-	-	-	David Busby
Interlude	-	-	-	-	John Baxter
Return Visit	-	-	-	-	P. F. Woods
Crux	-	-	-	-	John Rackham
The Postlethwaite Effect	-	-	-	-	B. N. Ball

Marooned upon a prison planet guarded only by an obsolete enemy spaceship in orbit, the human survivors from hundreds of Earth's defeated ships push on with the Great Escape plan—but the nearer E-Day approaches the more complicated staff problems become . . .

open prison

by james white

part two of three parts

foreword

At a time when the culture of Earth had spread to fifty inhabited systems and her colonisation programme was still expanding, mankind had made contact with another intelligent race—called the Bugs because they looked like giant insects and because it had eventually been impossible to crack the language barrier. At first a period of peaceful, if somewhat difficult negotiation had been in force, which inevitably broke down because they could not understand the more subtle workings of each others' minds. From there it was only a short step to war—a war which had now been going on for sixty years with neither side likely to win owing to the evenness of their respective technologies.

Because both sides were humanitarian in their outlook, prisoners were taken rather than killed, but in sixty years the problem of looking after them, of feeding, housing and keeping them far away from combat areas, took more administration than the war effort itself, especially when most of the prisoners were highly skilled technicians whose return to their own side could vitally effect the existing stalemate.

Then the Bugs evolved a brilliant plan—they found an Earth-type planet within their own area of space and landed prisoners to fend for themselves, allowing them sufficient tools to bring their living standards up to an agricultural level but keeping a strict watch on any activities which could lead to the building of an escape ship by placing an obsolete battleship in orbit around the planet. In twenty years the prisoners had built up a reasonable, if sparse, existence.

It was into this prison world that Sector Marshal Warren and the remnants of the crew of his battleship Victorious were eventually landed, and for him to discover that, as the senior officer present, he was now in command of thousands of men and women technicians with many thriving communities and a vast agricultural programme in hand. He finds the personnel split into two factions—those who have gone Civilian and are building a peaceful life upon the planet, marrying and having children, and younger, more recent prisoners, who conform to the space navy code and are planning the Great Escape.

Warren assumes command and steps up the preparations for the Escape plan but finds that on every hand he is hampered by Civilians under the leadership of Fleet Commander Peters. Despite this he fixes E-Day—the plan being to lure the shuttle ferryship down from the guardship by a metal dummy of a crash-landed enemy reconnaissance vessel, overpower the crew, man it with prisoners and take off and capture the guardship itself.

As the days pass, however, the plan becomes more and more difficult to evolve and resistance to any change in the status quo increases steadily from the Civilians. Warren sets out to appease them.

e i g h t

If it looked like anything at all, Warren thought, it was an elephant—a large, low-slung elephant with six legs and two trunks which were each more than twenty feet long. Below the point where the trunks joined the massive head a wide, loose mouth gaped open to display three concentric rows of shark-like teeth and above the trunks its two tiny eyes were almost hidden by protective ridges of bone and muscle. Between the eyes a flat, triangular horn, razor-edged fore and aft, came to a sharp point, and anything which had been caught by the trunks and was either too large or not quite dead was impaled on the

horn while the trunks tore it into pieces of a more manageable size. Because it had no natural enemies and was too big and awkward to profit from camouflage, its hide was a blotchy horror of black and green and livid yellow.

" . . . It is our policy, sir," Briggs was saying as the beast's heavy tentacles flailed bad-temperedly at the base of their tree, " to avoid battle with them if at all possible. Only if a party is caught in the open or if they have been retained by some farmer to kill the battler will we fight. So your people don't have to feel ashamed at being treed by a full-grown bull like this one. Killing battlers is a very specialised job . . ."

The rest of what he said was lost as the battler sent its twenty-foot tentacles questing among the lower branches of their tree. It found a thick branch, its tentacles curled around it and tightened, and the tree creaked deafeningly as the battler began lifting its forepart off the ground. But Warren did not have to have the technique of battler-killing explained to him. He had done considerable reading on the subject.

The only quick way to kill one of them was to seriously damage its brain, but this tiny organ was very well protected at every point save one by an inches-thick skull and the tremendous bands of muscle serving the jaw and tentacles. The single vulnerable spot was the roof of the mouth, and a cross-bow bolt or spear driven vertically upwards for a distance of two to three inches brought instant death.

Manoeuvring a battler into a position where this thrust could be delivered was a combined operation calling for great skill, a steady aim and even steadier nerves. It had been found that a superficial wound close to, but not on, the eye caused the battler's tentacles to roll back tightly and its jaw to drop open. This was a purely reflex action lasting for not more than a second, and it was during this period that the hunter had to evade the wildly kicking forelegs and inflict the wound. At the same time precautions had to be taken against accidentally blinding the creature, because if that happened the battler became so maddened that it was no longer possible to kill it quickly and it could devastate the surrounding countryside for days before it finally died. The mouth was the only weak spot and the hunter had to get there first time because he would not get a second chance.

His friends might, but not him, ever.

Below Warren the battler transferred its grip to a thinner branch which sagged, splintered and tore free under the strain, sending the creature crashing full length to the ground. The impact was like a minor earthquake shaking the area, then the beast rolled ponderously to its feet and moved away.

"Some of the farmers have succeeded in domesticating them," Briggs went on as it disappeared between the trees. "Cows, of course, and they have to catch them very young to remove the horn and tentacles without ill effects. They train them on a diet of grain and killed meat rather than let them catch it on the hoof. You'll see some domesticated cows in Andersonstown. Except for a tendency to kick their wagons to pieces in springtime they're very useful draught animals. We can go down now, sir," he added.

They resumed the trek, following a wide, sweeping curve to the northwest, calling on as many farms as possible until they struck the river, then following it to the sea. There were many farming communities on the banks of the river, comprising anything up to twenty houses sheltering behind a common stockade for mutual protection. His reception in these places was generally less strained than in single farm-houses, the concept of mutual protection apparently stretching to include big bad Sector Marshals, and he was able to meet a great many officers with very useful specialities. He met a large number of their offspring, too, and he was able to test out a number of his ideas and arguments, sometimes successfully.

"I never suspected that you were such a good politician, sir," Fielding said after one of the visits. "You kiss babies like you'd been doing it all your life. Or do you *like* the little terrors?"

"Some of them," Warren had replied guardedly, "are less terrible than others."

Since the meeting with the battler his men had ceased treating the whole affair as a picnic, their guide had become much more friendly towards them, and he was even able to indulge in backchat with Fielding and not show any visible signs of strain at this continued verbal contact with a woman. But as they approached Andersonstown, Briggs began to get the look of a man about to face a battler single-handed.

Unlike the Post on the hill overlooking it, no attempt had been made to screen Andersonstown from space observation.

It was a small town rather than a village, with well-planned streets of single- or two-storey log buildings, a wooden dock and about thirty boats of various sizes tied up alongside or at anchor in the bay. A semi-circular stockade protected its landward side, and because battlers could not swim, the seaward side was open.

Protocol demanded that he first call at the Post.

His intention had been to obtain the names and whereabouts of the most influential officers in the town with a view to visiting them and sounding them out before calling them all together for his major appeal. He had learned by heliograph that Fleet Commander Peters was also heading for Andersonstown and would arrive in three days time, plainly with the intention of throwing a spanner in the works—respectfully, of course, by calling for a public debate on the whole Escape question. Warren was still too unsure of his position to risk that, so he had to rush through the Andersonstown business and leave before Peters arrived.

But the greater part of the first day was wasted because Fielding insisted that she could not work properly in the uniform issued at their first Post because the outfits worn by Lieutenant Nicholson's girls were so much smarter that she felt everyone was laughing at her.

Nicholson, the Post commander, was a tall, greying but remarkably handsome woman. The uniform which she and the other officers on her all-female post wore consisted of the usual hide boots, trousers which were tighter fitting than was really necessary and a sort of bolero jacket which laced up the front with leather thongs. Some of the uniforms were laced higher than others, Warren noted, the degree of cleavage apparently controlled by the physiological contours of the officer concerned. Nicholson seemed a bit flustered at having to entertain a Sector Marshal at her Post, but not so much that she didn't crack a smile when she assured him that her girls were all officers and gentlewomen who would respect the privacy of the visitors' quarters, adding that the men in his party might expect to be whistled at from time to time but that they would be in no serious danger provided they did not whistle back . . .

It did not take Warren long to realise that there were unsuspected depths to this middle-aged, statuesque female with the nervous and almost impudently respectful manner.

She was one of the large number of female officers rejected by the Committee because of the embarrassment of her sex, but that did not stop her from cherishing Committee ideals—like the other girls on the post she wanted to do everything possible to bring about the Escape.

She was in touch with a great many non-Committee sources of information in Andersonstown, she explained that evening while Fielding and Warren were having dinner with her, and she realised that for the best results the Marshal should put across his ideas and leave before the Fleet Commander arrived to rally the opposition. Lieutenant Nicholson had therefore taken the liberty of arranging a meeting between a representative group of citizens and the Marshal to take place at the Post early next day.

When he heard that, Warren felt like kissing the Lieutenant and almost said so, but he checked the impulse. It would definitely have been *lese majeste* and Fielding would probably have wrung deep, dark psychological meanings out of it.

Warren was surprised to find next morning that the representative group of citizens numbered upwards of two hundred, although he was not surprised to see that the majority of them were girls. Not that he could see them very clearly, of course, because the only direct light coming into the assembly hut was from the trap above Warren's head, so that his table and chair were spotlighted while his audience were mere shadowy rows of faces. But he knew that Nicholson, Fielding and the others of his party were strategically placed among his listeners, the intention being to demonstrate the new and more cordial feelings towards non-Committee officers as well as to answer the sort of questions which could not be asked directly of a Sector Marshal. Warren had deliberately delayed his arrival so that these questions could be answered before he arrived.

He began quietly by outlining the war situation as he, one of the officers responsible for overall strategy saw it, giving information which was top secret and restricted without the slightest hesitation. It was a picture of a long, costly war which had reached the stalemate of mutual exhaustion. Compared with the large-scale offensive mounted during the early decades of the war, he told them, it would require only a relatively feeble effort now by either side to end it. But neither side was capable of making this effort. The space service demanded a very special type of person, and after sixty years of war the type had become extremely rare.

In a voice which was not so quiet he went on to tell of highly confidential reports which had reached him during and after many operations, of ships which had failed to make rendezvous because key members of the crews had suicided, or mutinied or shown in some other shameful fashion their inability to withstand the strain of a job which all too often was simply a few hectic minutes of action sandwiched between months of utter monotony. It was a recognised fact that the more highly intelligent and stable personalities could study or otherwise exercise their minds so as not to let them dwell too much on those few minutes during the months before they occurred, or during the equally long postmortem period when they were returning to base without some of the friends or husbands or wives with whom they had set out. The vast majority of present-day officers lacked these twin qualities of stability with high intelligence and could not withstand this strain, a strain which was being further aggravated by the fact that purely mechanical failures in the ships themselves were also on the increase.

At no time did Warren tell them in so many words that the population of this prison planet, should they return to active service, could bring about the end of the war in their favour within a few years. In every one of them, Warren was convinced, there was a still, small voice saying it for him, and he would only defeat his own purpose if he tried to shout it down.

"... This place is not escape-proof," he went on. "You know enough about the Anderson Plan and the work already done on it and you know that the number of officers directly concerned with the capture of the guardship is relatively small. The part which the rest of you will be called to play is also small but important. From most of you I will require simply your moral support, which *is* important, believe me ! From a few others there will be the added inconvenience of moving their families and belongings to safety a few months before E-Day, should the dummy be placed in an inhabited area. As well, I will have to ask for volunteers with the necessary aptitude or interest in the work to help with Major Hutton's research projects, and we will need officers who have the talent for it to donate a few hours a day to compiling text-books and training manuals, or to teaching. Then there is the problem of the children . . ."

Warren could not see faces clearly in that dim room, but he noticed quite a few heads come up sharply, including the bald, shining pate of Anderson himself, and he felt the atmosphere begin to congeal. Just as it had congealed at the Nelson farm and in the other homes and villages where he had brought up this highly ticklish subject.

"... As you know," Warren continued, veering away from it temporarily, "there are a number of officers here who, although they are extremely valuable people, will be unable to return to active service because of age, family ties and so on. Again, some of you have been here so long that your early training may be out of date. That is why I want text-books and training manuals prepared, circulated and studied so that you can be fitted for ship service or, in the cases of older officers or those who have acquired families, for training commands. And while you are busy bringing each other's education up to date, you must give some thought to the children . . ."

Next to the Escape itself, Warren knew, his greatest problem was the large number of children born to the prisoners and the very mixed feelings of these officers regarding them. Coupled with the natural feelings of responsibility and affection towards them there was a definite feeling of shame that they were there in the first place, because no self-respecting officer would even consider having children while on ship service or while a prisoner of war—although it could be argued that the situation here was a case of being marooned rather than imprisoned. Warren did not seek to chide or criticise, and because they were expecting him to do both they would be relieved when he did neither, and tend to be more sympathetic and less critical of the things he did say. Which was why he stressed the problem of the children and did not even mention the Escape, giving the impression that getting off the planet was simply a matter of time and as certain to occur as the Tuesday of next week.

"... Through circumstances beyond their control," he went on seriously, "these children have been born into a very primitive world. When they return to civilised society I would not like to think of them being hurt or embarrassed in any way because of illiteracy, or even partial illiteracy.

"And now," he concluded, resuming his seat, "are there any questions?"

The first question came within seconds from a man, dimly seen but with a young voice, at the back of the hut. It was a searching, detailed question having to do with certain technical aspects of the Escape itself, proving to Warren that his verbal sleight-of-hand had not worked with one person at least.

"If you don't mind I'll ask Flotilla-Leader Anderson to answer that question," Warren said. "After all, it's his plan we're using . . ."

And now I'm using Anderson, too, Warren thought with a growing feeling of shame. The Flotilla-Leader could be expected to defend his own plan better than anyone else was capable of doing, but the very act of defending his own brainchild proclaimed that he, the leading citizen of the town which had been named after him, was supporting the Marshal, and if he had not been an old man and grown a little stiff in his thinking he would have realised that he was being used.

All at once Warren felt that he was becoming a quite despicable character. It was not simply the Anderson business which had brought on the feeling, it was the fact that he was lying to everybody, including himself. Without promising anything in so many words he had given the impression that none of the activities which had gone on among the prisoners would be the subject of a court martial, or that officers who had married and had children on the prison planet would not be expected to return to ship service while their youngsters were cared for by institutions.

Certainly he would exert every iota of his very considerable authority as a Sector Marshal to bring this about, but he could not be absolutely sure of how the High Command would view the situation here or how the desperate shortage of officers would affect their thinking. And there was his not quite accurate picture of the war situation. It would all have been much simpler if everyone was as keen as the Committeemen, and there had been no children to worry about and no necessity to lie and cheat and play people off against each other.

He became aware that Anderson, who despite his age had retained a firm voice and the habit of command, had demolished the first questioner and that another officer was on her feet. After giving name, rank and qualifications she asked if it were possible for her to volunteer for duty with Major Hutton's research section.

Warren told her that it was.

"But . . . but . . ." she began, then stopped.

"I can see that you are a girl, Lieutenant Collins," Warren said, in a tone which was complimentary rather than sarcastic, "and I have a sneaking suspicion that it is not only patriotic zeal and the urge to escape which is driving you. I am aware of the situation here, you see, and I can say that I have the greatest respect and admiration for officers like yourself who have resisted the pressures to adopt polygamy as a solution. However, there are certain aspects of this duty, certain dangers, which you should consider. Not only is the terrain rugged between Hutton's mountain and this town, with the danger of battlers every mile of the way, but at the end of the trip there is the frightful risk of being mauled by two hundred and fifty men who have not seen a girl for . . ."

They laughed longer than the crack warranted, he thought, but when they had settled down again the questions were simple requests for information rather than subtly worded objections. By the time the meeting ended Warren had eight more volunteers and the questioning had turned to the possibility of obtaining leave on their various home planets after the Escape.

He knew then that he had them, and that there was little if anything that Peters would be able to do about it.

n i n e

The complex system of tunnels and chambers had been carved out of the solid rock to duplicate the major corridors and compartments of the great Bug guardship, Hutton told him, and the dimensions and proportions were as accurate as repeated psychological probing of the memories of the prisoners could make them. As he spoke the Major sounded intensely proud of the place—with justification, Warren thought.

"This was part of the mine's original workings," Hutton went on, "since bypassed because of low yield. Someone remembered that the useless tunnel was approximately the same length as the central corridor of the guardship, so we decided to cut out Control, Drive and shuttle-dock compartments and use it for training assault groups. The later additions and refinements—cross corridors, the Bug living quarters

that we know about, dummy controls and Drive housings—were and are useful in training, but they also served as make-work for the people who, with nothing but assault drills to occupy them, would otherwise go stale. Only the more important compartments have been reproduced and the bulkheads are, of course, greater than scale thickness because of the necessity of supporting the system. The entry locks have been made as bulky and difficult to operate as the real ones, but the two things which we cannot hope to reproduce are the Bug lighting and the weightless conditions . . .”

Hutton broke off as another assault group pounded along the corridor past them. The men wore kilts, but there were bulky wickerwork baskets covering their heads and heavy logs strapped to the shoulders to simulate the equipment they would have to carry.

“Those kilts give too much freedom of movement,” Warren said. “The drills should be made more life-like. Can you reproduce the Bug atmosphere . . .?” he broke off, nearly strangling himself in an effort not to cough.

“It is bad today, sir,” said Hutton apologetically. “The wind must be blowing up the gorge again.”

The base of Hutton’s mountain was riddled with inter-connecting tunnels, labs, living quarters and the ventilating system which rendered them livable. The air inlets, which also served as observation and communications tunnels, joined the main network at several points while a single outlet used the chimney effect to carry away the smoke and heat from the smelter and machine shops, at the same time drawing fresh air into and through the rest of the system. This outlet emerged some distance up the mountain in a gorge so narrow and steep that the river responsible for its formation fell in a series of spectacular cataracts, the spray from which merged with the smoke so effectively that it was impossible to distinguish them at a distance of a few hundred feet much less from an orbiting guardship. But when the wind blew directly into the gorge as it did a few times a month, the smoke did not escape completely and the interior of the mountain became barely habitable.

“Is it necessary to duplicate Bug air, sir?” Hutton asked suddenly. “There are other gases easier to produce which would be unpleasant enough to make them careful without being lethal . . .”

Warren shook his head. "These drills have become—well, drills—something performed without conscious thought. That frame of mind will have to go. Besides, your people working on the assault suits will be that little bit more careful if they know that the wearer can die, during practice as well as on the big day, if they make a slip."

"The Bug atmosphere is deadly stuff, sir," Hutton said thoughtfully. "Getting rid of it afterwards will be a problem. We'll have to evacuate the place and rig fans to—"

"When we've taken the guardship we won't *need* the mountain!" Warren snapped, irritated by the objections. "Except, that is, as a place to house Bug prisoners, in which case a few tunnels and compartments already filled with their atmosphere would come in handy."

In the flickering yellow light of the oil lamps Hutton's face, already red from constant proximity to open furnaces, grew even redder.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Hutton. "Maybe I haven't fully accepted the fact that *we* will be taking *Bug* prisoners of war again . . ."

Warren relaxed. "You will, Major, you will," he said, smiling. "And now let's go and give your spacesuit technicians a pep-talk . . ."

Considering the necessity for concealment and the severely limited resources available, the level of technology inside Hutton's mountain was surprisingly high. As the weeks passed Warren gradually came to know every room and gallery and dimly-lit corner of the place, and his growing familiarity bred admiration rather than contempt. He grew used to the hiss and thump and rumble of the steam engines at every major intersection and the endless belt and pulley systems which transmitted their drive to the mechanical hammers, lathes, air-compressor pumps and to the fans which augmented the natural ventilation system.

He considered normal the anvil chorus from the smithy and machine shops which echoed continuously throughout every tunnel in the mountain, the sound becoming as familiar and distracting as the ticking of a bedroom clock. He became accustomed, when the wind was in the wrong quarter, to conducting staff conferences where every fifth word was a cough, although on those days he tried whenever possible to visit the heavily camouflaged lab out on the mountainside

where the gunpowder was produced and where they were currently developing more sophisticated forms of nastiness using wood, alcohol, oil and various combination of organics.

One of the most important things he learned was that Hutton only *appeared* to object to all new ideas and suggestions. The Major had a habit of considering minutely every aspect of a question, the snags first and then the advantages, and Warren's original mistake had occurred because the Major was also in the habit of thinking aloud.

Hutton was now getting all the specialists he needed. From Andersonstown and from farms and villages out to a radius of two weeks travel away they came trickling in. Most of them were girls, of course, but there were enough men among the recruits to tell Warren that he was gaining support for the Escape itself and not merely operating a part-time matrimonial bureau. Naturally the weddings were coming thick and fast and, while there were any number of ex-Captains around to officiate, Fielding suggested that it would be a nice gesture and a considerable boost to a girl's morale to be married by a Sector Marshal.

Warren did not mind. It would serve to improve and strengthen his image, he thought cynically, against the time in the not too distant future when he would have to start getting tough with some of these people.

The time came some eight months after his visit to Andersonstown, on the first occasion that Kelso and Hynds were present at the mountain together. Major Hynds received his orders first.

"You have the communications system and enough non-Committee support to begin our re-education programme," Warren said. "I want you to organise the manufacture and distribution of paper and books on the widest possible scale. Every adult on the planet must shortly have enough paper to take initially, say, fifty thousand words. Wherever possible there should be consultation between them to avoid duplication of effort, but the main thing is that they commit to paper everything they know. Every fact, theory, background detail or item of personal knowledge regarding their specialities as computermen, hyperdrive engineers, astrogators, ordnance officers, doctors, psychologists or what have you. Also details of their hobbies and any helpful experiences gained while living on the prison planet. They must organise this

data as best they can, bearing in mind the fact that they are preparing the texts from which their fellow officers will study . . .”

Warren broke off, then said sharply, “ I caught the remark about us being lucky that paper grew on trees, Major, but I missed the rest. Speak up !”

“ I said sir,” Hynds answered warily, “ that I suppose I’m the logical one to head this programme, although up to now Intelligence and Education had a very tenuous connection to my mind. But *hobbies*, sir ! And planet-side experiences . . . !”

For a time Warren stared silently through the Major. There were very good reasons for preparing books on prison planet know-how, but some of them could not be given to his Staff. He also thought, self-analytically and a trifle philosophically, that while sometimes it was a good thing for a tactician not to let his right hand know what his left was doing—an enemy had two chances of being surprised then instead of one—if carried to extremes the tactician might find that he had surprised even himself. Warren could not understand why, now that the everything pertaining to the Escape was going so well, the possibility of its complete failure worried him more and more.

Nor could he understand why his disposition towards his Staff and other senior Committeemen continually worsened, even though, both individually and as a group, his feelings towards them were little short of paternal. Unless the reason was that he liked and trusted them so completely that he allowed more of his true face to show to them than to less important people, and the face was that of a mean, short-tempered old man.

Abruptly Warren brought both his mind and his eyes to a focus on the Major, realising as he did so that his blank stare had caused Hynds considerable discomfort. In a tone so warm and friendly, and so different from that which he had been employing of late that it made the Intelligence head even more uneasy, Warren said, “ All hobbies are useful, Major, some more than others. You have two fully operational gliders at Thompson Mountain which you would not have had if certain prisoners had not had the juvenile hobby of building model aeroplanes. And those not directly of use are usually

good for morale. So far as recording prison planet experiences for study is concerned, there are two reasons for this.

"First," Warren continued quietly, "you must have realised by now that there may be other Bug prisons like this one, and that when we return to service there will be the possibility of us being captured again. I want as many officers as possible capable of forming an Escape Committee wherever they may be imprisoned. The second reason will become plain when you hear my instructions for Lieutenant Kelso . . ."

Not to mention a third reason, Warren added silently to himself as he turned to face the Lieutenant, which he could not go into now or, perhaps, ever.

"I've a big job for you, Kelso," he went on. "That of making the people of Andersonstown and the smaller coastal villages into sailors. You will initiate a large-scale boat-building programme—and not just fishing smacks, I want ships capable of carrying passengers, livestock and cargo in useful quantities over long distances. While it is getting under way you will send exploring teams to the other continent and to the islands which link it to us.

"As well as filling in some of the blank spots on our maps these teams will advise on likely sites for farms and villages which must be built to house the officers evacuated from this continent. As a large proportion of these officers will be townspeople they will have to study the texts produced by earlier farmers . . ."

The expected storm of protest came then, with Kelso as its centre and Hynds, Fielding and Hutton silent only because the Lieutenant was putting forward their objections much more vehemently than they dared or were capable of doing themselves. Kelso, Warren noted, was becoming downright disrespectful.

". . . You can't do it and they won't stand for it anyway!" Kelso was saying. He was beginning to run down and also to drift from the point. "There's no need to waste men and effort exploring the other continent when there's still enough room on this one, no reason to evacuate anyone to it, and this idea of sending everybody to night school is a sheer waste of time! In your efforts to gain support for the Committee you're undermining it, wrecking it and everything it stands for! Look at all the women coming here, and our location is supposed to be a secret! I tell you the whole damned Committee is fast going Civilian and our security is shot to hell . . .!"

"Our security is shot to hell . . . sir," said Warren reprovingly.

Fielding coughed and the two Majors began rubbing their jaws suddenly so that the lower halves of their faces were hidden. Kelso was silent for a long time, his face becoming a deeper red with every second which passed, then he mumbled, "I—I'm sorry, sir."

"Very well," said Warren. Still quietly, he went on, "Your two main objections are that we don't need the other continent and that we're all going Civilian. Well, now, I personally do not care, Lieutenant, if the whole Escape Committee goes Civilian if in so doing we are enabled to Escape. With that out of the way we come to my reasons for wanting the other continent, some of which you should not have to have explained to you, Lieutenant—weather observation posts for accurate forecasting immediately prior to the escape date, and the communications relays to bring the data to us.

"The Escape itself must be made as foolproof as is humanly possible, which means that no effort or sacrifice however great will be too much if by it we can allay Bug suspicions or otherwise improve the chances of the Escape by the tiniest fraction, and I can tell you that our sacrifices will be considerable. At the same time we will not move until we are as certain of success as it is possible to be.

"Even so," Warren continued, the rasp coming back into his voice despite himself, "It would be criminally negligent and stupidly unrealistic if I did not consider the possibility of failure, or take all possible precautions against Bug reprisals, because we must assume that if the attempt aborted they would retaliate with nuclear weapons. In such an eventuality I would like everyone not immediately concerned with the Escape to be as many hundreds of miles away as possible where, we hope, they will live to try another day."

The expressions on the faces around him were definitely subdued, Warren thought grimly, and with E-Day just under two years it was not too early to remind them of the consequences of failure. There were still far too many Committeemen who thought of the Escape as something which was always in the future, an event which would never actually come to pass.

Returning his attention to Kelso, he said briskly, "They will stand for it, Lieutenant, and you will have the job of talking them into leaving. If your well-known charm fails there are various types of pressure which can be brought to bear. It will be a gradual process, of course, so much so that I doubt if force will be necessary at all.

"Here is what I had in mind . . ."

t e n

The morning of E-Day minus three hundred and eighty was cloudless and hot, with a stiff land-breeze which rendered the heat of the sun pleasant rather than unbearable. Taking advantage of the breeze as well as of the fact that the guardship would not rise for another fifteen hours, one of the new catamarans was racing for the concealed anchorage on the nearest island, plowing a dazzling white double furrow across the waters of Anderson Bay. The ship passed close enough for Warren to see details of its deck cargo—sections of a glider slipway and a dismantled two-man sailplane—before the bow-wave sent his own boat rocking madly.

Beside him Hutton directed some derogatory remarks after the hurrying cat, then handed Warren a wooden bucket with a glass bottom.

"If you look down there, sir," he said, "you'll see the units we've had under two hundred feet of water since last night. I'm going to see if any have sprung a leak."

At Hutton's signal one of the officers in the larger boat nearby took his place on the overhanging platform which had been built on to its stern, and began carefully hauling in the line which had been attached on the surface to a coloured float. Simultaneously another officer slipped over the side and trod water, his face submerged for minutes at a time as he watched the suit under test rise slowly towards him.

The problem arose because the Bugs had allowed the prisoners to retain their service battledress while divesting them of the associated equipment which converted this ship-board uniform into a short-duration spacesuit. Solving it had turned out to be one of the hardest jobs the Committee had had to tackle.

Various combinations of materials had been tried in the production of home-made substitutes—wood and glass helmets painstakingly carved to fit the metal shoulder rings of the suits, airtanks fashioned from hollowed-out logs and air-hoses of finely stitched leather reinforced along the seams with the foul-smelling glues and sealing compounds which Hutton's researchers had developed. Despite everything the air-hoses ruptured, the log tanks split from internal pressure and the wooden helmets, besides leaking like sieves, retained so much of their wearer's body heat that they were impossible to work in.

The answer, so far as comfort and safety was concerned, seemed to be all glass tanks and helmets joined by a short length of cane to which was attached the control taps, but it was not a good answer because the arrangement lacked flexibility and was highly susceptible to accidental damage.

Because the only efficient sealing compound, a tarry substance with a fairly low melting point which set as hard as rock was nearly as brittle as the glass it sealed, the slightest strain put upon the device by the wearer caused the helmet or tank to crack where they joined the rigid air hose. But it was just not practical to send up an assault group with instructions that, no matter what was happening around them, they were to bend only at the hips !

In the poison-filled tunnels of the guardship mock-up at Hutton's mountain the men had actually carried out a series of drills in such brittle death-traps, so far without any fatal accidents. The men had gone through their manoeuvres grim-faced and stiff-backed and they had insisted that they could do the same under weightless conditions in the guardship, and they had insisted further that no conceivable agency or circumstance, be it Bug, human or major natural catastrophe would panic them into making the sort of sudden, unthinking movement which might kill them. Even though there could be no doubt about their bravery, Warren knew some of the hot-heads who made up the assault groups and he had done some insisting of his own. To Hutton, that he produce a better answer.

Now the answer was drifting up through the green depths of the bay towards the surface, a grotesque man-shape with a giant misshapen head and a pouter-pigeon chest. When it broke the surface the officer already in the water detached the

weights which had held it to the sea bed and helped lift it aboard. Hutton brought his boat alongside so that Warren could see the details.

To a stiffly-inflated spacesuit had been added a glass helmet and airtanks of conventional Hutton design, the two tanks being mounted in front so that the taps in the hoses were easily accessible to the wearer. The fishbowl, a lumpy sphere of varying thickness whose optical properties left much to be desired, was enclosed at the top, back and sides by an open lattice-work of thin cane shoots which continued over the shoulders and down the back to the level of the hips, and curved outwards to enclose the two spherical chest tanks.

Sealing compound had been used to reinforce the wicker-work shield, a large amount of seaweed had become entangled in it overnight and several varieties of marine life wriggled and flapped in and around it. The object made Warren think of a man who had undergone a rather gruesome sea change, then he had a second look at the spherical chest tanks and decided that it couldn't possibly make anyone think of a man at all.

Hutton said, "The wickerwork around the helmet and tanks protects them against accidental damage, and is open enough to allow unwanted heat to escape by radiation from the helmet. And enclosing the body to hip level in this . . . this form-fitting waste basket means that the arms and legs can be moved freely even violently, without danger of the air connections coming adrift. It is comparatively light and fairly rigid, sir, and considering the materials, facilities and time available I consider it to be the best workable design to be produced. I'd like your permission to put this one into production, sir."

The tone of the normally cautious and reticent Major contained the nearest approach to smugness that Warren had ever heard from the research chief, so that it was plain that Hutton thought he had the answer and was expecting a pat on the back for finding it.

Warren grunted and scrambled on to the projecting platform of the larger boat, where he lifted the dripping weed-covered spacesuit carefully and tilted it backwards and forwards several times. He replaced it on the platform and rubbed the green slime from his hands on to the back of his kilt.

"There's at least a pint of water sloshing about in there," he said, withholding the pat temporarily.

"Sealing the helmet and wicker surround on to an empty suit is tricky, sir. With a man inside to direct the sealing process there should be no leakage."

Warren nodded, smiling. "Permission granted. You've done very well, Major. I suppose you'll put Lieutenant Nicholson's girls on to it?"

"Yes, sir," said Hutton, "and the girls in town and in the nearer farms will want to help too. I'd prefer to have female officers exclusively working on this project. They have the temperament for fine work needing lots of patience, and they'll feel that they're making a direct contribution to the Escape, something which they don't feel slicing paperwood or copying textbooks all the time."

Hutton paused while a second suit broke the surface and was hauled in, then he went on, "The wickerwork shield and connections requires approximately one hundred and ten hours work, although this will come down as the girls gain experience. We'll standardise production into four basic sizes . . ."

As the Major talked on enthusiastically, Warren began to consider the implications of having a workable spacesuit and how it would affect his immediate planning.

The fact that the wickerwork spacesuit project had already leaked to practically everybody did not concern Warren as much as it did people like Kelso and Hynds, who threw up their hands and howled loudly about Security. The time was very near when certain matters must be discussed and plans drawn up which *would* have to be kept secret from the general populace, but meanwhile officers talked too much and allowed themselves to be pumped by admiring friends and the process was allowed for, and in some cases actually fostered by Warren. Gossiping was good for morale and news or information gained with difficulty tended to have more weight given to it than that which was given away free.

Warren's eyes were caught suddenly by a motion in the sky which was too regular to be a sea bird. A glider was coming in from the direction of the glass plant further up the coast, at an altitude which showed that it had made good use of intervening thermals. It banked steeply above the town, side-slipping off surplus height and generally showing off. The underside of one wing bore the white diamond which indicated a trainee pilot.

The glider men were not supposed to talk, but it was general knowledge anyway that they operated in conjunction with the survey catamarans, that the cats which explored the other continent and set up observation posts had, as part of their duties, the construction of camouflaged glider runways on nearby slopes. The job of mapping the other continent had been enormously accelerated by the gliders which, wind and cloud permitting, could range anything up to one hundred miles inland from their coastal bases. However the cat men were not supposed to talk about the places they'd been—at least, not officially.

So the information leaked out that the other continent was much superior in every way to their present environment, and the fact that it was a leakage of true information aided Warren's plans considerably. The ground over there was more fertile and at the same time less densely wooded ; the mountains, rivers and lakes were higher, longer and more beautiful and the grass was, of course, greener there. The greatest selling point of all, a stroke of sheer good fortune which Warren could still hardly believe, was that for reasons which were still obscure the native life-form known as the Battler was virtually unknown on the other continent.

So the officers with young families whose farms were in constant danger from these creatures, as well as men who simply wanted a change of scenery, began pressing Warren to evacuate them. The numbers had grown to such proportions that he was building more and more ships to cope with them as well as pulling cats off survey duty. Every time Meteorology forecast suitable winds and a lengthy period of overcast which would hide the operation from the orbiting guardship, a small armada left for the other continent.

The glider swept out over the bay, banked steeply and headed shorewards again on a course which would take it near a squat, log building set on the edge of the sea which was its hangar. In the boat Hutton had stopped talking and was watching it go over, his expression reflecting the odd mixture of pride, criticism and parental concern of the person who is observing the antics of one of his brain-children.

Because Hutton had had a lot to do with the designing of the latest gliders, it had been he who had insisted that, for ease of operation and subsequent rapid concealment, they should be built to fly off sloping ramps and land on water.

He had designed the stepped hull, and, when the first three test models had cartwheeled all over the bay because one wing-tip float had dug itself into the water while the other was in the air, he had suggested the sponsons—short, stub wings projecting from the fuselage just above the water line, which removed the landing hazard and in the air added to the lift.

It had also been Hutton's idea to use rockets for gaining height when the necessary up-draughts were absent or for extending the glider's range, and he had designed solid-fuel rockets. Hutton was something of an all-round genius, and he was one of the reasons why Warren's plans had gone so smoothly up to now.

Starting today, however, the snags, hitches and deliberate foul-ups would come thick and fast. Peters would see to that.

Warren had not spoken to the Fleet Commander since the day of his arrival. At first he had avoided meeting the other by always keeping on the move. Then gradually it became apparent that Peters no longer sought contact with him, and Warren thought he knew why. Peters probably believed that his arguments for the Civilian viewpoint that first day had, when the Marshal had had a chance to think them over, converted Warren to Peters' way of thinking, and during the past two years Warren had managed to proceed with the Escape plan without disabusing the other of this notion.

Fleet Commander Peters, Warren had long ago decided, was intelligent enough to realise the danger, the long-term danger of the two factions which had grown up among the prison population. He had not been able to accomplish much against the Committee himself except to pare down their numbers and make them an even tighter and more fanatical group, but he must have hoped that someone with Warren's authority could succeed where he had failed. One of the ways this could be done, again given the rank which was Warren's was ostensibly to take over leadership of the Committee and wreck it from within.

The steady increase of cordial relations between Committee and non-Committee members, the inter-marrying and the free passage into hitherto secret Committee projects would appear to Peters as a definite Civilianizing process. As also would the boat-building programme, the gliders and the

opening up of battler-free land on the other continent—not to mention the definite Civilian applications of the re-education programme. True there were good Committee reasons for doing all these things, too, but a tired and ageing Fleet Commander might think that these reasons had been provided by Warren to keep the Committeemen happy while he dispersed them and dissipated their energies in what was obviously Civilian work.

Warren's recent suggestion of lighting the streets of Andersonstown at night with oil-lamps—a measure aimed at showing the orbiting guardship that they had nothing to hide—could also be taken as a first indication that the prisoners were beginning to accept their lot and settle down.

It had been an elaborate double-bluff aimed at lulling Peters and the opposition which he represented into a false sense of security, but when Hutton's spacesuit went into production the Fleet Commander would not be so old and tired that he would not realise what had been going on, and Peters would react.

With the Fleet Commander alive at last to what was happening, the obvious course would be to hit him as hard and as often and from as many different directions as possible, but Warren had somehow to do these things without losing the respect he had built up among Committee and non-Committee alike. If any particular order seemed too harsh he would have to issue another which took the sting out of it, or at least focussed attention elsewhere.

The glider was skimming the surface of the bay, the first step slapping rhythmically along the tops of the waves until water-drag abruptly checked its forward speed and it came foaming to a halt. A long, low boat with twelve oarsmen and a towing rope was already shooting towards it to haul it into the cover of its hangar.

It had become almost a reflex these days to cover or otherwise conceal any object likely to arouse the suspicions of the watchers in space. So much so that the action was performed with the same speed and enthusiasm even, as now, when the guardship was below the horizon.

But sight of the glider had given him an idea. It was in connection with one of the points raised by Ruth Fielding at the last Staff meeting about the steadily increasing birth-rate . . .

eleven

Warren said, "The evacuation must be speeded up, Lieutenant. All personnel not actively engaged on Escape work must be cleared from this area six months before E-Day. You can use the line that I am becoming increasingly concerned over the possibility of Bug reprisals in the event of an unsuccessful attempt. Stress the fact that I'm thinking of *their* safety, and the safety of these children we're continually acquiring who aren't, after all, combatants. You know the drill, lay it on thick. Hynds will give you a list of Peters' supporters and I want you to make a special effort with them. All potential trouble-makers must be moved to the other continent and dispersed before they can organise serious opposition."

Kelso nodded briskly and bent to make notes. Warren turned to Hutton and said, "You have a progress report, Major?"

Progress in the Research sub-committee was satisfactory, Major Hutton reported, which, from a person as cautious as he was, meant that it was going very well indeed. The necessary quantity of assault suits would be ready and tested by the required date, as would the sections of the dummy. Improvements in glass-making had given them a lens which was much more capable of resolving activity around the guardship. Gunpowder, flares and an incendiary material analogous to napalm could be produced in any desired quantity within reason. Hutton concluded by saying that in his opinion no further progress was possible until the position of the escape site had been fixed.

Warren nodded, then said, "Hynds?"

"I'm having trouble with the re-education project," Hynds said. "The preparation and distribution of material is going fine, but the only texts being studied are those associated with farming. This is understandable considering the numbers of inexperienced people being shipped to the other continent, but I've suggested pretty strongly that some of the time they save in not having to build stockades should be used boning up on hyper-jump theory, nucleonics and such instead of . . . of . . ."

"Acting like rabbits," Sloan, from the other side of the table, finished for him.

"Not in those exact words," Hynds said, smiling but with an uncomfortable glance at Ruth Fielding who was beside him. He went on, "Apart from this we are up to schedule. The weather posts and communications relays are, or will be, set up and operating in time. Hutton has given us an improved signalling device . . ."

The device, Warren knew from his examination of the drawings, consisted of the light from a bright-burning, shielded fire being focussed into a tight beam and directed towards the next leg of the relay. The beam had just enough spread to compensate for the fact that the stations were usually mounted in trees and subject to wind movement, so there was no possibility of it being seen from above. It was used in conjunction with a telescope to increase the range and accuracy at the same time cutting down on the number of relay stations needed.

". . . But the final alignment and full-scale testing of the system, sir," Hynds concluded, "must wait until the escape site has been chosen."

"Major Sloan," said Warren.

"We carried out the practice run between Mallon's Peak and a pretended escape site twenty-three miles away," the Training chief said in his tight, perpetually angry voice. "I used eight-man carrying platforms where there were no roads and wagons pulled by domesticated battlers or my men where roads were available . . ."

Between the subsidiary smelters at Mallon's Peak and the road two miles away the going had been hard. They used the trees for cover whenever possible, but soon discovered that the more effective the overhead concealment the more difficult it was for the platforms to move. They had the choice of moving like snails undercover or of making rapid progress leaving a trail which a Bug guard would probably be able to spot with his naked eye. The compromise forced on them, crossing open ground on duck-boards laid down ahead of the column and picked up in their wake, involved so much extra work and confusion that Major Fielding's idea for maintaining smoothness and uniformity of effort could not be tried. The men were too busy cursing to have the time, or inclination, to sing.

When the thirty-two platforms with their simulated loads arrived at the road they were transferred into wagons drawn up under the trees which bordered it. Sixteen domesticated battlers, all that could be collected in the area, were already harnessed to their carts and moved off at once, but the other vehicles had to be pulled by his men.

It began to rain heavily.

Under normal conditions—five or six battler-drawn carts and less than fifty pedestrians per week—the Committee roads were adequate. Their top-surface of broken rock cemented together with clay gave good support while allowing rain to drain away quickly. But with sixteen battlers and upwards of three hundred men dragging maximum loads over it in a steadily increasing rainstorm, the surface began to break up. Battlers pulling the leading wagons sank into it up to their knees, which meant that the men harnessed to the following wagons were almost hip deep in the tracks the beasts had made. Then the wheels began to sink into the gradually liquifying surface and the struggling, cursing procession began splitting into three parts.

In the lead were the carts pulled by the domesticated cows, being dragged over or through all obstacles—in one case despite the loss of a rear wheel—by animals whose tremendous strength left them sublimely indifferent to loads, gradients or road conditions. Then came the wagons, bunched together and falling steadily behind the first group, which were harnessed to officers whose language was not that of gentlemen and who were all too conscious of such factors.

Finally there was the group which laboured furiously to heal the deep, muddy scars left in the road so that when the sun came out and dried it off there would be nothing to arouse the suspicions of a possible observer in the guardship.

Three miles from the pretended Escape site the road crossed a bridge which spanned a deep ravine between two thickly-wooded hills. The first part of the convoy was slightly ahead of schedule at this point and the other two considerably behind it, and the bridge had never before been subjected to such a load. The first three battlers and their wagons went across without the structure showing any visible signs of strain, although the same could not be said for their drovers and handlers and everyone began to breathe easier.

It was when the fourth wagon was at the centre of the bridge, with Sloan sitting beside the driver, that it happened.

A bull battler, old, mean and large even for one of that physically massive species, erupted from the trees near the other end of the bridge. The cow pulling the wagon which had just crossed reared and plunged sideways as the tremendous head of the bull crashed into its flank just above the middle set of legs. Suddenly it was on its side, rolling off the edge of the road and dragging the wagon with it into the ravine. The driver leapt clear and landed on his hands and knees on the steep slope below the road, scrabbling desperately for a hold on the grass covering it. Before the cow and the wreckage of its wagon hit the bottom of the ravine, and before Sloan could see whether the driver had made it or not, the bull was charging on to the bridge.

The cow harnessed to Sloan's wagon reared and backed away, the lumps below her eyes twisting and throbbing. It was well known that the courtship of male and female battler was an incredibly violent business—they charged each other and slapped at each other with their twenty-foot trunks, rolling about and parrying each other's blows in such a way that their trunks appeared to be knotted together. But this was a domesticated battler whose horn and trunks had been excised a few days after birth, and who had never had experience of anything but human beings and other domesticated battlers like herself. So whether the advance of the bull was murderous or simply over-amorous she had no way of defending herself against the heavy tentacles battering at her head and back. There wasn't space enough on the bridge to turn so she reared ponderously and retreated until the wagon driven backwards and swinging off centre, snagged against the heavy guardrail.

The driver realised what was going to happen before Sloan did and he began sawing frantically at the harness with his knife. Sloan joined him, hacking at the broad straps which hung slack one instant and were pulled tight the next with every movement of the terrified animal. It seemed only a split second after the last strap had parted that the cow's evasive action became too much for the guardrail. With a tearing, splintering sound the battler and a section of rail whisked out of sight, the shock of its impact with the ground shaking the bridge.

Jammed as it was at an angle across the bridge, and so heavily laden that they could not climb over it in time to escape the bull's flailing tentacles, the only possible means of escape

was to go under the wagon. Sloan, on the heels of the driver was scrambling past the front axle when something smashed against the backs of his legs, tightened suddenly around them and began hauling him backwards. He was yanked upside down into the air, one of the bull's tentacles wrapped tightly around his knees while the other one curled around his neck, under one arm and across his chest and together began pulling him in. The gaping red pit of the battler's mouth and the deadly triangle of its horn seemed to rush at him, then slowed an instant before he was impaled as the battler altered its grip.

Both hands were still free. Sloan grabbed the end of the horn and fought to push it away from him.

Had it been a younger battler whose horn was still smooth and razor-edged instead of being roughened and blunted by the bodies of too many victims and the passage of too much time, Sloan's terrible grip around the point of the horn would simply have caused him to amputate his own fingers. If he had not been a man of unusual strength he would have been skewered within seconds, anyway, but he held his grip and even tightened it as, forearms rigidly extended and elbows pressed against his pelvic bones for support, the bull started shaking him from side to side.

He couldn't take his eyes off the point of the horn as, pitted with decay and stained with earth, sap and the dried blood of previous victims, it twisted and jerked within a foot of his stomach. His hands were sweating and at any moment he felt they would slip, just as he felt that two steel bands were tightening around his legs and chest as the tentacles coiled tighter and tighter. He couldn't see for sweat and he had no breath to shout for help, although about three hours later, so it seemed to him, help arrived.

The recognised way of killing a battler quickly was a three-man operation aimed at placing a cross-bow bolt through the soft area inside the mouth which was close to the brain, after which the beast died with dramatic suddenness, but such fancy operations were impossible in the cramped space of the bridge, even if Sloan's body had not been in the way, and somebody had thought of using one of the new grenades.

It wobbled into his field of vision, a small, heavy bottle mounted on a throwing stick, burning its last quarter inch of

fuse. Sloan did not look at who was holding it because he was suddenly in greater danger from the grenade than he was from the battler. As the grenade was pushed into the bull's mouth he threw every ounce of strength he possessed into an effort to twist to one side.

There was a muffled thump, a surprisingly quiet sound, and the battler's mouth jerked open. Blood, brains and fragments of broken glass erupted past him. The tentacles relaxed their hold and the beast rolled on to its side, toppled off the edge of the bridge and joined its last victim at the bottom of the ravine. Sloan would have gone with it if somebody hadn't had a strong grip on his kilt.

" . . . But here were no fatal casualties among the men," the Major concluded. "One load and two domesticated battlers were lost, but the damage to the bridge was repaired quickly and all traces of the mishap covered. We arrived at the escape site two hours and twenty minutes late, which time was not completely accounted for by the trouble at the bridge. In my opinion all future practice runs should be made on the route we intend to use on E-Day."

"Uh, yes . . ." said Warren.

He had never liked Major Sloan as a person and he could not like him now, Warren told himself, but he found himself wishing suddenly that it was possible for one senior POW to promote a subordinate prisoner, or to award a decoration or to do something more meaningful than the bestowing of a few words of praise. He was still trying to frame words suitable to the occasion when Ruth Fielding spoke.

"My non-Committee sources of information tell me that there was another spot of trouble on this practice," Fielding said angrily. "Perhaps Major Sloan is too disturbed through re-living his harrowing experience to remember the second incident?"

Sloan and Kelso both glared at her while Hynds and Hutton merely looked uncomfortable, all of which told Warren that they all knew something he did not know and that the reason for him not knowing was because they had deliberately kept it from him. He also knew that it must be important because Fielding was not the sort to tell tales. Warren stared hard into Sloan's ravaged face and snapped, "Well, Major?"

Sullenly, the other said, "When we got to the escape site and officially ended the exercise, one of the farmers complained about losing his two battlers and wagons in the ravine."

Warren nodded. "I can sympathise with him over the battlers, at least—they have to be caught young and it takes six years of hard, patient work to tame them. What did you say?"

"Nothing," said Sloan. "I broke his jaw."

"You broke . . ." began Warren, and stopped. The sudden reversal of his earlier feelings for the man was so great that he was too angry to speak.

"There was no need to do that," began Hutton worriedly, but Sloan shouted him down.

"He didn't have to pull his guts out dragging wagons through the mud ! He didn't have any trouble at all ! All he did was lend us two lousy battlers and then sit back on his fat—"

"I'd have done the same," Kelso put in hotly. "I'm getting sick of sweet-talking these Civilians into doing things for us, making them think *they* are doing *us* a favour ! We do all the real work and take all the risks, and we're supposed to be obliged to *them* . . . !"

"Major Sloan," Fielding broke in, sarcasm tinging the anger in her voice, "may be too emotionally disturbed to recall that the man whose jaw he broke was nearly sixty, lightly built rather than fat, and that another non-Committeeman who went to his assistance was roughed up by some of the Major's men—although in this case the injuries were not disabling. And that all this strong-arm stuff took place before the two men had any knowledge of the trouble the Major had just gone through . . ."

"Tempers were short on both sides," said Hynds quickly, with a warning glance at Kelso. "A pity, but understandable in the circumstances—but we need the help of these people, Lieutenant, and flattering some of them into giving it—a lot of them give it willingly, remember—is one of the easiest chores facing us . . ."

"No !" Kelso raged back. "I'm sick of licking the boots of lousy Civilians, deserters ! So-called officers who think more of their deserter wives and brats than—"

Warren's fist crashed on to the table-top. In the silence which followed his voice sounded loud even though he was trying to keep it down, and trying to keep the anger and

disappointment he felt from showing in it. He said, "When I allowed a measure of informality during Staff meetings I did *not* give you permission to wrangle among yourselves! I will think about this matter and decide what restitution and disciplinary action is needed. Meanwhile, and if you can refrain from sniping at your brother officers, Major Fielding, I'd like your report."

As the psychologist began speaking, Warren was giving her only a fraction of his attention. He had seen the smug, unrepentant expressions of the faces of Kelso and Sloan. They knew, and rightly, that he could take no strong action against an officer as important to the success of the Escape as the chief of Training. Hutton, and to a lesser extent, Hynds, had registered embarrassment and disapproval at what must look like weakness on his part.

It would have been so very different if they had all been like Hutton, the type of personality which a simple suggestion, a hint of a challenge, was enough to call forth maximum effort, and it would have been nice if the whole Escape operation, now that it was going so well, had been free of internal bickering and dissension. Such things introduced a sour note into what should have been, what *was* a bold, imaginative and truly great endeavour. But he had to work with the material at his disposal, Warren told himself, and while Fielding, Hutton and Hynds were easily controlled and directed, Kelso had to be driven with a very light rein. Sloan could not be driven at all. Like a missile with a faulty guidance system, he kept going in the direction he was originally pointed, regardless.

". . . And to summarise," said Fielding, winding up her report, "there are enough non-Committee personnel behind you at the present time to give all the help necessary to the Escape. There is a small but growing opposition to the Escape, but I don't see it hampering us seriously provided we don't furnish it with material . . ." She didn't mention names or even look at Sloan, she didn't have to. ". . . to turn people against us. At the same time the enthusiasm for the Escape which has already been built up can go stale if we don't bring it to a tighter focus. So it would help a great deal in maintaining interest and support if I knew where as well as when the Escape will take place."

A broken jaw, Warren thought as she sat down angrily, could cause a great deal of pain over a lengthy period of time, especially in a man pushing sixty whose age tended to make healing a slow process. Knowing Ruth he decided that it was the doctor in her rather than the psychologist which was angry, and he felt the sympathetic anger rising again in himself.

Curtly, he said, "It seems you all need that piece of information, and you can't go much further without it. Very well, I'll give it to you—ten days from now at Hutton's Mountain. There are some jobs I want done first, records and dossiers to be collected—you'll get the details in due course. Meanwhile you can go. All except Majors Fielding and Sloan—I want to see you two.

"Separately," he added.

twelve

Quite apart from her concern over the Sloan incident, Fielding was troubled by the attitude of the original Committee towards those who had joined after Warren's arrival, the men of the assault groups being the worst offenders. Every officer on full-time Escape work wore Committee uniform, but while the uniforms were supposed to be just that, those worn by the first group had certain markings and methods of fastening which set them apart from group two. They were all in this together, she said, but it was as if some officers had graduated from a top military academy while the others had merely come up through the ranks . . .

"This is understandable," Warren broke in at that point, "when you consider the fact that these men are responsible for the most crucial part of the operation, and I'm afraid the closer E-Day approaches, the more superior they will feel. I'll do what I can, of course, but it would be better if you stressed the importance of support duties as much as you can so as to make the other party feel more important too. Frankly I'm disappointed in the behaviour of some of them myself, but I still think that the men who are going to take the guardship can be forgiven a few misdemeanors.

"At the same time," he went on seriously, "I don't want the opposition getting the idea that Committeemen are a pack of hoodlums and bullies, and the Sloan incident could easily give them that impression. That is why I'd like to push through an idea I've had for some time . . ."

The idea had had to wait on Hutton's ruling on the feasibility of a glider taking off from water under rocket assist. The ordinary two-man gliders with their considerable pay load could be re-designed to rise from the water and stay up when their rockets were jettisoned, but to withstand the stress of such a take-off the wing structure would have to be strengthened, which would increase the all-up weight, the gliding angle and seriously restrict their range. Hutton, however, had come up with a workable compromise.

With a modified hull which would unstick more quickly from the water, a conventional, two-man glider with its entire payload consisting of rocket units could land at its destination *and* take off again provided the passenger was left behind. The passenger, after his work was done, would have to hike to the nearest launching post to await transportation home . . .

" . . . The other continent is a glider-pilot's paradise," Warren continued. "Mountains, lakes, thermals and updraughts all over the place. The population is very widely scattered and, since that rash of weddings we had last year there is another problem. Being able to send a doctor by glider to the spot where he's most needed, within a matter of hours, will help to alleviate it.

"We'll have to build a lot more gliders," he concluded, "but they're useful to have, anyway. And providing fast medical aid when we are so busy with other aspects of the Escape should look good to the non-Committee people, and it should counter the unpleasantness caused by the Sloan incident, don't you think?"

In a strangely neutral voice, Fielding replied, "It will certainly look good to the expectant mothers, sir."

Warren stared hard at her for a moment, then he said quietly, "Believe it or not, I had been considering them, as well."

She relaxed suddenly and smiled. Warren returned it and went on to give her instructions for picking up some material on Bug psychology he needed and taking it by glider to Hutton's Mountain. He expected to be at the mountain himself by that time and they could work on the material together. When she left he sent for Sloan.

But there wasn't much he could say to the Major apart from commending him for his behaviour during the exercise and deploring his conduct after it. While he talked Warren kept

seeing the rain and mud, the wagons bogged down and a bull battler pulling him on to its horn. He fancied he could even see the old, dried bloodstains on it as he fought desperately to push it away, and somehow the commendation took much longer than the reprimand which followed it. When Sloan left Warren shook his head helplessly and tried to clear his mind for more important work.

Andersonstown had grown tremendously over the past two years. The increased boat- and glider-building, the necessity for procuring and storing food and setting up repair facilities, all had added to the size as well as the population of the town. The Escape work went on practically around the clock, which was why Warren had ordered a steady increase in street-lighting at night—at least, that was the reason he had given up to now. But the town, although growing in size, was dwindling in population now as more and more people moved to the other continent. There were scores of storehouses, homes and adjacent farms lying empty, and it was high time that they were re-occupied.

Warren spent the rest of the day drafting the orders which would bring mining specialists from Hutton's Mountain to fill the waiting accommodation, the remainder to be filled by a less specialised labour force which would be placed under the direction of the miners. He announced that it was time they did some practice tunnelling in soft ground, and he suggested a spot for it—a thinly-wooded area half a mile inland from the town and a few hundred yards from the road which led northwards to the glass factory. The dirt from the tunnels could be hidden under the trees until after dark when it could be carried away and dumped or rather spread over, the marshy ground to the south.

The Sloan business still troubled him and he decided that in the circumstances it would be better if he apologised in person, and made restitution in the form of two domesticated battlers from the corral in Andersonstown to replace those which had been killed. The replacements would have to be commandeered again whenever necessary, but he would not stress that point.

An examination of the wall-map showed him that there was a hill-top Post with glider-launching facilities less than ten miles from the farm he intended to visit, and it was almost in line with his final destination at the mountain. A nice,

long hike would probably do him a world of good, Warren decided, especially since he seemed to be developing a symbiotic relationship with his desk these days.

The day of the all-important Staff meeting arrived. Decisions taken today would be irreversible, Warren knew, and subject only to the most minor of modifications. He felt an almost boyish excitement growing in him as he watched his Staff file in and take their seats. Their expressions were tense, puzzled and anticipatory. At the outer entrance they had had to pass two guards with cross-bows at the ready and a brace of grenades stuck in their belts who had requested them to halt and identify themselves—and since the fraternisation order had gone into effect two years ago anyone, whether they were Committee or otherwise, had been allowed to go anywhere in the mountain.

The walls of the room itself were covered with Bug physiology charts, ambush tunnel layouts, and detailed sketches of the dummy and of the guardship interior. Significantly, one of the maps was a chart of the heavens as seen from the prison planet covering the section of space which was thought to contain Sol.

One saw mud . . . thought Warren.

Aloud he said, "Up to the present, security measures and the classification of information have been unnecessary. Everything leaked, and we liked it that way and even made use of the fact. Henceforth, however, everything which goes on in this room is classified until I direct otherwise. You will not discuss anything which goes on in this room, even amongst yourselves, outside it. From now on this room will be locked, sealed and guarded day and night, and nobody except Staff officers will be allowed entrance. The reason for these measures will shortly become plain, but meanwhile, and before we get down to fixing the Escape site, there is one hard, harsh fact that we all must face."

He paused, seeing all their eyes on him, then went on, "It is this. Anything, literally *anything*, which will increase the probability of a successful Escape must be and will be done ! I have admitted publicly the possibility of failure, and urged decentralisation against possible reprisals, but privately I admit no such thing ! We can, we *must*, escape on this attempt ! Is this understood ?"

They all nodded, some, he noted, more enthusiastically than others.

"Very well," he continued, "we'll begin by considering the plan originally put forward by Anderson, the modifications it has already undergone at our hands, and the further changes which I intend to introduce now . . ."

Several basic assumptions were called for in the plan, but from what they knew of Bug psychology and military organisation these assumptions were justified. The first one was that the location of the prison planet would be unknown to the vast majority of enemy officers on active service. Given that, a hypothetical Bug warship—a small vessel, so badly damaged in battle that its hyperdrive generators kept dropping it into normal space at short and erratic intervals as it limped home—could be brought on the scene.

The plight of this hypothetical ship could be such that when it materialised near the prison planet it was forced to land quickly on the night side, its condition so grave that it was unable or unwilling to go into orbit. It would not be aware, naturally, of the other Bug ship already in orbit around the planet, and it could be assumed that after the damage it had sustained in a recent engagement, that its crew or even its communications equipment was in no fit state to maintain a round-the-clock radio watch.

Instead of the unarmed scoutship containing a pilot only which had been envisaged by Anderson, this one would be the Bug equivalent of a corvette with a crew of four—the assumption, again strongly justified, being that the Bugs looked after their own just like humans and that they would feel more constrained to risk rescuing four of their people than they would one. It would be a risk from their point of view, because a rigorous examination of data gathered from De-briefing had established the fact that there were only about thirty Bugs on the guardship, that a study of the behavior of these beings during the transfer of prisoners showed them to be an unusually timid and over-cautious lot, and that it seemed fairly certain that if they weren't actually Bug civilians they were a pretty low order of military.

This was not surprising because the job of guarding a planet called for a phlegmatic disposition and a capacity to resist boredom rather than sharpness of intellect, but while the dullness of mind might play into the hands of the escapers, the

proven timidity of the guards represented a real danger. There was always the possibility that the guards, on seeing one of their ships damaged by enemy action and crash-landed, might be panicked into bombing it if, as the original plan called for, there was no sign of life about the wreckage. They might consider it more important to keep the wreck from falling into the hands of the prisoners than take the risk of rescuing colleagues who were probably all dead anyway . . .

" . . . That is why I've decided that the dummy must show some signs of life," Warren went on briskly. " Also, the placing of the dummy ship is critical in that it must not be more than seventy miles from either of the two mountains where its metal sections are presently concealed, this being the maximum distance they can be transported while the guardship is below the horizon, and the site must be well served by roads or accessible by sea. No matter how we look at it this places the site within a ten-mile radius of Andersonstown, and Major Fielding warns me that we may be stretching coincidence a little too much to have the ship apparently land where the farms and prison population are thickest when in the darkness they could have landed anywhere in two whole continents."

Warren rose and half-turned towards the wall-map behind him, lifting his pointer as he continued, " Bearing all this in mind I've decided to place the dummy half a mile south of the town, just here.

"Major Fielding assures me that this will not arouse Bug suspicions, because what would be more natural than for a badly damaged ship to land as close to the lights of a town as possible, especially on a planet deep inside its own territory where it would have no reason to expect the natives to be unfriendly. . ."

Ignoring Kelso and Hutton, who were fairly stuttering with surprise and incredulity, he went on, " The advantages of this site are obvious. The non-metal framework of the dummy can be transported to the town and stored long before E-Day, more than half of the metal sections can be moved by sea, which will be much less trouble than by road as well as freeing manpower for the convoy which must come overland, and the accomodation for the people working on the ambush tunnels is ready-made, which is the reason for me already ordering Hutton's mining specialists into town . . ."

"But . . . but . . ." began Kelso, the first of them to become articulate. "I mean . . . that is, I understand now why you insisted on more and more street lighting at night. It seemed stupid at the time— Uh, sorry, sir, but you know what I mean. But even so, considering the cowardice of the guards, isn't it unlikely that they would risk landing so close to the town?"

Warren sat down again and said, "When the time comes the risk will not seem great to them, Lieutenant. Let's suppose that in coming down so close to town the ship lands practically on top of a farmhouse, setting fire to it with its tail-flare and burning the occupants. This is an unfortunate, but allowable coincidence. Angered by this killing we'll suppose that the human prisoners from town attack this hypothetical ship which, although damaged by battle and a hard landing, still has its C-7 projector operable. The attack will be repelled and in the process all the farms in the immediate vicinity will be burned. I don't foresee there being much left of Andersonstown, either.

"When the guardship rises, which on that day will be an hour before dawn," Warren continued, "it will see the fires. Later, when it climbs higher, it will have a bird's eye view of the nicest little scene of devastation that a Bug could wish to see. Certainly there will be ample evidence that someone is alive and kicking in the dummy ship. The risk of sending down a rescue party will seem negligible, and the Bugs in the guardship should not have their suspicions aroused at all, because the whole area around the dummy will be burning furiously and all our people who are not directly attached to assault groups will seem to be high-tailing it out of town by road and sea, all making like panic-stricken refugees for all they are worth."

He stopped speaking to look at the faces around the table.

All Sloan's teeth were showing and his eyes glared their approval, Kelso's face was split by a grin of sheer delight as he murmured "Man! Oh, *man* . . . !" But Warren had been expecting some such reaction from Sloan and Kelso and they hadn't let him down. It was the others who were causing him anxiety now. Fielding had been co-operative, but coldly disapproving since she had learned of his plans. Hynds was staring at him over his ridiculous spectacles, his mouth grim.

Hutton seemed to be still partially in shock, although it was he who spoke first.

"Do we have to destroy the *town*, sir?"

To Warren it seemed odd that an officer whose technical ability and capacity for improvisation had been the greatest single factor in the successful preparations for the Escape should cavill at a little destruction of property. The Major was going soft, and Warren did not know as yet whether to be glad or angry.

"I'm afraid we do, Major," he said impatiently. "As I've already told you, *anything* which will in any way improve our chances, goes. And surely you realise that after the Escape the condition of the town will not matter—although here I must stress again that the projected destruction of Andersonstown is information restricted to the present company. Others besides yourself, Major, may have a sentimental attachment for it and may want to make trouble.

"And now," he went on, "before we start work on the ambush and communications tunnel layouts, a job which will take some time, there are still some occupied farms near the escape area which will have to be evacuated. The people in them are being stubborn and I'd like to discuss methods of getting them out—short of stampeding a herd of battlers through their stockade, that is . . ."

Kelso and Sloan laughed, Warren noted, but not the others.

t h i r t e e n

From the observation platform in the highest tree in Nicholson's post the town looked peaceful and innocent, which was exactly how it was supposed to look since the guardship was overhead at that moment. A few fishing catamarans drifted aimlessly on the bay and in the streets the people were deliberately moving slower than usual, giving the impression of people who did not have much to do. Warren nodded approval and swung his telescope to bear on the escape site half a mile to the south. It was the afternoon of E-day minus one hundred and seventy-two.

Beside him Hutton said, "The ambush tunnels and ready rooms are complete, sir. Half an hour's work will break them through to the surface once the dummy is in place. We start on the communications tunnels now, one to the observation and

attack point in that clump of trees and another to link up with the hollow to the right. I thought of linking all attack points with secondary tunnels in case the shuttle lands in the wrong spot and causes a cave-in. If I can keep work parties on it round the clock we can finish them in time."

"Do that," said Warren.

He was thinking that now he would have to send for Major Sloan's commandos, that Hutton's suit and explosives technicians would also have to be brought in and billeted in Andersonstown, and that the place was going to become devilishly crowded if he couldn't talk the remaining non-Committee people into moving out. As well, with the influx of men and material it was going to be impossible to maintain the pretence that all the tunnelling that was being done was simple practice, and when the non-Committee people realised that the actual escape site was to be within half a mile of the town, they would react. Some of the smarter ones would take a closer look at the tunnel layout, and at the type and quantity of material currently being moved into the town, and they would be able to piece together his plan in its entirety.

But the assault groups would have to accustom themselves to moving in bulky spacesuits through narrow, dimly-lit and often muddy tunnels, and to waiting for hours on end in those conditions. They would have to learn to operate effectively after long periods without food or water, and cope with the problems which must crop up. Warren had no other choice.

"Simulating the projector damage worried me, sir," Hutton said, bringing Warren's mind back to the here and now. "To achieve the effect you want will require enough powder and fire-paste to start a non-nuclear war, and making such a quantity means hurrying the manufacturing process, which will add tremendously to the risk of accidents. Storing it in town is asking for trouble, too, considering the way some of the tunnellers act when they come off duty. One wrong move and the town would go up, prematurely. That would certainly tell the Bugs we were up to something!"

Compared with some of the difficulties Hutton had overcome these were as nothing. The answer was simply to tighten up on safety precautions, but Hutton was acting as if the whole plan was in jeopardy. The Major, Warren thought angrily, was beginning to drag his feet.

A lot of officers these days seemed to be dragging their feet or were visibly having second thoughts about a great many things, and the odd thing about it was that most of them were Committeemen of long standing, not recruits. With less than six months to go, enthusiasm for the Escape should have nearly reached its height . . .

On E-Day minus one-forty-three Fleet Commander Peters arrived at the post, unescorted and requesting a meeting. Warren granted the request and Peters was shown into his office, a room not nearly so sound-proof as the Staff room in Hutton's Mountain, but then Warren had the feeling that many of the secrets he had been trying to keep were secrets no longer, otherwise the Fleet Commander would not have been there in the first place.

He stood up when Peters entered, a courtesy he had not extended to a junior officer for more years than he could remember, but when the Commander took the chair on the other side of the table without either saluting or saying "Sir," Warren sat down again, violently.

"I don't mean to be disrespectful," Peters said, obviously reading Warren's expression and feeling that some sort of apology was called for, but the bitterness in his voice robbed it of all warmth or sincerity as he went on, "It is simply that I can't bring myself to salute while wearing this caveman get-up—I'm improperly dressed—and I have no right to do so in any case since I passed the compulsory age of retirement four months ago. I'm afraid I really have become a Civilian, Marshal."

Hutton and Hynds and a few others had begun to whine at him, Warren thought angrily, and now the chief member of the opposition was doing it, and the self-pitying whine of the aged from an officer of this man's stature sounded worst of all. It took a great effort for Warren to alter his expression and say pleasantly, "We'll have to escape now, Commander. Four months back pension plus retirement bonus is too much to give up . . ."

"You don't have to humour me, Marshal," Peters said quietly, "I'm not as old as all that."

Warren stopped trying to be pleasant. He said, "You wanted an interview. You've got it, but you'll have to make it short."

Peters bowed his head, muttering something about no longer being entitled to the courtesy due his rank and that he was foolish to expect it, then he looked up and said, "I seem to have started this all wrong. I'm sorry. What I came for was to ask you to cancel the Escape attempt. Permanently . . ."

"Don't laugh at me, dammit!" he raged suddenly, then in a voice filled with quiet desperation he went on, "You can do it if you want to, I know that. In two and a half years you've done things which I thought were impossible! Making Kelso run errands for you and like it, when we were all expecting the exact opposite. Making hidebound Committeemen fraternise, and very often marry non-Committee officers and generally turning the Committee upside down and inside out—and making them all like it!"

"Not to mention having all the married officers with children practically eating out of your hand because you expressed concern for their safety and lack of proper education. All this, with the build-up of non-metal technology, communications, exploration and now even an efficient medical service, was simply an elaborate ruse to disarm our suspicions and to clear the escape area of everyone but your personal bully-boys!"

"And don't try to deny that Andersonstown will be the Escape site," Peters went on angrily, "Because too much work has gone into the so-called practice tunnels. There are other indications, too. You probably intend to destroy the town!"

Warren did not try to deny it.

"When you deliberately avoided meeting me," Peters continued, "and when you kept doing all these unorthodox things I thought you were on our side and were boring from within, or should I say leading the Committee to its own destruction. There were times in the early days when I could have hamstrung some of your projects, but I helped them instead—quietly of course, so as not to make Kelso and the others suspicious. I know now that I was deluding myself, but I thought that a person with your ability and authority would also have the intelligence to see that . . ."

He broke off, shaking his head. Pleadingly, he said, "I'm making a mess of this again. I'm sorry. What I want to say is that there is still time to make the bluff the actuality and the Escape the ruse. You can do it. I have never in my life met anyone else capable of doing it, but you could. Please."

Warren was silent for perhaps a minute, staring into the other's desperate, pleading, embittered features, and feeling impatient and sympathetic and not a little embarrassed by compliments of such blatant crudity. Then suddenly he shook his head.

"I won't cancel the Escape just because you ask me to," he said. "Even if you gave good reasons, which you haven't up to now, I wouldn't do it. You are aware of the situation as it was when I arrived here. If I hadn't got tough there would have been a civil war on the first day! And I give you credit for intelligence somewhat above the average, Commander, so that you must realise where the situation must lead. The outbreak of fighting between Escape Committee and Civilians, stabilising itself with the farmers and other Civilians submitting to the authority of local Committee posts which would furnish protection against battlers and the raids of neighbouring Committeemen which would shortly become indistinguishable from slavery, and then more violence as the Posts recruited and trained their slaves to fight for them and expand their respective territories.

"You must realise that a descent into savagery would be swift and all too sure, and that succeeding generations would grow up in a feudal culture which would get a hell of a lot worse before it got any better. I'm thinking in terms of hundreds of years . . .!"

Warren broke off, realising that he was almost shouting, then went on more quietly, "One reason for the Escape is that I can't allow such a criminal waste of high intelligence and ability to occur. Another is that the training and ability of these officers could very well win the war for us if they were returned to active service. Yet another, and perhaps the least important of the reasons, is that it is the duty of any officer when taken prisoner in time of war, no matter what the circumstances, to make every effort to escape and rejoin his unit . . ." Warren's tone, still quiet, took on a cutting edge. ". . . Do you still believe in a sense of duty, Commander?"

Peters shook his head violently, but it was probably in anger rather than in simple negation. He said harshly, "Those are good reasons but they are not good enough to excuse what you're going to do. Surely you see that yourself—unless initiating and pushing through large-scale operations regardless

of mental or physical suffering is an occupational disease with Sector Marshals, and I don't want to think that of *you* !

"As for duty, traditions of the service, patriotism—with a really intelligent person, patriotism is a matter of inner conviction, while those of lesser intelligence, such as the type of officer the service is producing now, have to have it conditioned into them !

"Surely you can see that it is the older and more highly-trained officers who tend to go Civilian," Peters rushed on, "and that the later arrivals make the most fanatical Committeemen. You can't avoid the implications of that. It's my guess that even now, within the Committee and possibly even among your own Staff, things have begun to go sour on you—people having second thoughts, wondering if they are in fact doing the right thing. Because it is the sensitive, intelligent people who are the stuff of traitors. And you could help subvert them. Even now you could turn enough of them against the Escape to—"

"That's *enough* !" Warren thundered, his anger at this man who had awakened all the self-doubt and mental turmoil which had made sleep nearly impossible for him in the early months of captivity, and which he had thought were settled at last, was so overwhelming that for several seconds he could not speak. But finally he said, "We *must* escape, Commander. I've given this a lot of thought, believe me. Escape is the only real solution and I can conceive of no possible argument which will change my decision—"

"You mean you want to go on playing with your soldiers !" Peters broke in, his face and even his balding scalp blotchy with anger. "Earth, the war and the glorious traditions of the Service are just excuses to let you go on feeling important ! To let you make a last, heroic, stupid gesture which nobody but your fellow prisoners will ever know about . . .!"

"Get out, Commander !" said Warren thickly.

"Very well !" said Peters, jumping to his feet. "I'm wasting my time here anyway, trying to talk sense to a stupid, narrow-minded martinet with delusions of grandeur ! But I'm warning you, Marshal, I'll do everything possible to stop this escape short of killing you . . .!"

"I'm sorry, *Mister* Peters," Warren said coldly, as he also stood up. "Sorry that you had to add that qualifier. It puts me under an obligation to stop short—not too far short, perhaps—of killing you if you try to hamper me !"

It was some time before Warren's anger subsided to the point where he could feel regret at his mishandling of the interview. He should not have been angered by the other's initial lack of courtesy or lost his head when Peters had got home with the jab about his best officers being potential traitors. He should have kept his temper and remembered that the Fleet Commander was an old, embittered man whose mental processes had hardened too much for him to see that there could no easy way out of Warren's dilemma. . .

Abruptly, Warren strode out of the room and the Post, his intention being to inspect the new tunnels, chat with the officers working on them and generally to occupy his mind with any constructive activity which presented itself. For the thought had come to him that it might not be only the Fleet Commander's mental processes which were hardening, and with that thought came rushing back all his other doubts.

fourteen

At first Warren thought that one of the domesticated battlers had broken loose and was wandering the streets, grunting and scuffling at the ground with itching stub tentacles, but when he turned the corner he saw that it was a fight.

The light from the nearest street-lamp was too dim to show subtle variations of uniform, but it was obvious from the silent ferocity of the battle that the men themselves were in no doubt as to who was who. There were seven of them, four against three, and they were tearing into each other with hands, feet, heads and in one case teeth. Individually they were equally matched in size and weight, but the three appeared a little faster, more vicious and fractionally less drunk than the four.

Warren started forward to intervene, but before he had taken two paces it was all over. The victorious three moved away, one of them limping slightly, towards the noisy, brightly-lit storehouse which had been converted into an assault group club. The defeated four were on the ground, one on his hands and knees with what, in the bad light, looked like fresh black paint, covering his face, another was clutching his stomach and being sick and the other two weren't moving.

A watchman came trotting up, stopped and began blowing a call for stretcher-bearers, a signal which had become all too

familiar of late. He kept on blowing the whistle clenched so tightly in his teeth that Warren thought he would bite through the wood, until there was a distant acknowledgement. He knelt beside one of the motionless figures until the stretcher-party arrived, then rose, cursed horribly and trotted back to his post.

As he joined the group around the injured men, Warren made a mental note to speak to Hutton about some of those watchmen. Their job was to guard the explosive stores against the wanderings of unauthorised or irresponsible—or more simply drunk—personnel and there their job ended, but recently they had been taking on some of the more general duties of policemen. They didn't seem to realise that horning in on what was essentially a private fight was a sure way of getting hurt, as well as arousing the dislike of both parties.

Warren was not surprised to see that the stretcher-party were all girls. With the spacesuit building programme nearing completion and the book-making and copying projects moved to the other continent there was little else they could do except staff the hospital which had been set up to treat injuries among the tunnellers. They were temperamentally suited to the job, of course, and while Warren had been irritated when they had refused to be evacuated with the rest of Nicholson's girls, he was now glad that they had stayed. The doctor in charge of the party was a man, however.

He gave his lamp to Warren and told him exactly where to hold it while he examined the injured men. Considering the fact that their heads were often less than six inches apart there was ample light to see each other's faces, but the doctor pretended not to recognise Warren—acting on the assumption probably, that he could say things to a chance helper which he most definitely could not say to the Marshal.

“ . . . Three ribs gone and maybe a ruptured spleen,” he said as his fingers explored the injured man's chest and abdomen. His voice was singularly lacking in the quality known as professional calm. “ Those injuries he got while lying here on the ground, *after* he was out ! I suppose it's one way to get a non-Committeeman to leave the area—and look at his face, and at that ear ! Damn near bitten through ! Animals fight like this . . . *Animals !*”

Warren listened silently while the other relieved his feelings at some length. When he finally got the chance to speak his voice was grim and at the same time pleading. It was a tone he had had to use so often of late that it had begun to sound insincere even to himself.

"I don't like it any better than you do, Doctor," he said. "It grieves me to see officers who are supposed to be fighting the common enemy fighting among themselves instead, but with just five weeks to go everybody is getting tensed up. It's natural—the situation rather than the people are to blame. And the riotous night-life we go in for . . ." He laughed briefly. ". . . which nobody expected or prepared for. But the first prisoners learned how to make beer, and stronger stuff, from the local vegetation, and officers who have been digging all day or night in hot, badly-ventilated tunnels or training in practice suits without food or water for twelve hours have a right to a little relaxation. Our trouble is that we can't standardise the strength of the brew, and when people get drunk they are more inclined to fight.

"Since the tunnel sabotage it has been much worse, of course . . ."

On E-Day minus fifty, in an attempt to control the growing disaffection between the assault groups and the labour and supply forces, Warren had ordered a special inspection. The inspection was doubly special in that it was to be the first time in more than two years that all work on the Escape ceased in Andersonstown and the surrounding district, and that while it was taking place every man and woman wore their green ship-board uniform instead of the permutations of kilt, harness or shapeless leather garments normally worn. He had ordered this so as to point up the fact that there was no basic difference between them, that they were all brother officers . . .

The sour note had become apparent as soon as Warren mounted the review stand to address them. Simply it was that the uniforms were not uniform. Stupidly he had forgotten that the Committeemen treated their ship's battledress as their most treasured possession while the others had worn theirs until it was in tatters before being forced to change to the home-made clothing. So that even when they were all dressed the same it was still glaringly obvious who had been Committee and who had not. Despite this Warren had not done too badly.

He had begun in much the same fashion as he had opened previous speeches and arguments, by contrasting living conditions here with those of civilisation, and he had moved on gradually to reminding them of their obligations to themselves and to the human race. He told them that if they were to passively accept their imprisonment it would be the first step in a regression towards eventual savagery and such a shameful, such a calamitous waste of intellect and training did not bear thinking about. To escape was their simple duty, therefore, and not something which could be argued about.

But the Escape would demand great sacrifices from all of them, and in many cases the suffering would be psychological as well as physical. They would have to blunt their finer sensibilities, forget that they had ever been nice people, and remember only that they were going to bust out of this planet-wide prison no matter what.

Warren did not know at what stage he had stopped consciously using verbal push-buttons, at what point the fierce pride he felt in these splendid officers drawn up before him and the truly glorious undertaking on which they were engaged began to overcome him. Some of their duties appeared more important than others, he had told them, but that they should remember that the work of the battler drover, the assault commando and the lonely officer at a relay post a thousand miles away was equally necessary to success. After the Escape, history would accord them equal honour and homage as the heroic officers who had never given up, who had achieved the impossible and who would be chiefly responsible for restoring peace to the Galaxy.

He wasn't sure at what point it was that he knocked over the speaking trumpet Hutton had rigged for him, but by that time he was shouting too loudly for it to matter. He had lost much of his control and the pride he felt in them and in what they were doing communicated itself to the officers ranked before him. Suddenly they had begun to cheer, the officers in tattered uniforms as loudly as the others, and Warren had dismissed them shortly afterwards because there had been a distinct danger that he would have grown maudlin about them if he had gone on.

It had been during these proceedings that the pumps used to clear the main ambush tunnel of seepage had been dogged open, and the ford across a nearby stream converted into a

low dam with stones and mud. The water level had risen only a few feet, but this had been enough to send water pouring back along the wooden pipe which normally emptied into the stream to flood the tunnel.

A full week was needed to repair the damage, which necessitated evacuating the whole tunnel system while the water was pumped out and the tunnel roof and walls, so softened by the action of the water that they were in imminent danger of caving in, were baked hard with charges of fire-paste. Assault men had to place and fire these charges, and while they were burning, the atmosphere inside the tunnels was unbreathable. It was a severe test for the spacesuits and for the tempers of the men wearing them. The suits had tested out fine, but the tempers, judging by the condition of the four men at present on the way to the hospital had not.

It had angered Warren that the assault men no longer trusted the labour and supply force, even though the majority of the latter were undoubtedly loyal to the Committee. Sloan's commandos had begun to mount an unofficial guard at certain vital points, which angered the hard-working tunnellers and explosives technicians even more. The constant bickering and snarling and, at times, outright bloody violence which had followed his "We're all brother officers," speech had not improved Warren's own disposition. He seemed to be constantly angry these days, but the anger, he had found, was a good cure for his self-doubts.

Not all the fights were as vicious as the one he had just witnessed, however. Perhaps, he thought cynically, the fighters had not been entirely able to forget that they were nice people. Frequently he came on officers singing as they marched off shift or on the way to training areas, usually to a blood-curdling accompaniment of signal drums and wooden whistles. Tunes like "Waltzing Matilda" and "John Brown's Body" and "Colonel Bogey"—the latter a song which, according to Hynds, had never possessed a printable lyric in the three hundred-odd years since it was written. Not all the songs were martial, however, a fact which bothered Kelso and Sloan so much that they brought it up at the Staff meeting on E minus thirty-six.

"... Stupid, sentimental songs like that are bad for morale!" Kelso had said. "Hutton's people are the worst offenders, singing about peace and Christmas and . . . and . . .

Some of the words are *anti-war*—pacifist stuff, and downright subversive! ‘Where have all the flowers gone?’ indeed! Suppose the commando units get infected with this sort of tripe . . . !”

“Anything which makes them want home,” Warren had told him sharply, “is all to the good.”

Warren had wondered briefly how it was possible to both like and dislike what he was doing, and the people who were helping him to do it, intensely at one and the same time.

In Hutton’s Mountain, strangely deserted now that the metal-work was complete and most of the technicians were in Andersonstown making explosives, he came on men adding the finishing touches to the dummy sections—lavishing the patience and care of a Michaelangelo on the job of making their sections of plating show the pitting indicative of a too-fast entry into atmosphere, the buckling and discolouration of a near-miss by a beam weapon and the deep, bright scratches caused by it running through the exploding fragments of sister or enemy ships. But the real artists he saw were in Mallon’s Peak, where a smaller and more specialised group were preparing the airlock section of the dummy.

During a brief trip to the other continent with Hynds he saw a glider medic mis-judge a landing. It had been dusk on a still evening with the surface of the lake as smooth as glass, and it had looked as if he had calculated his touchdown about twenty feet below the actual level of the water. They had reached the floating wreckage in time to extricate him before he drowned, but the whip action of the crash had broken his neck and he had died shortly afterwards.

In the carefully neutral voice which he always used these days when Warren was around, Hynds had remarked that the planetary population figure would show no change, as the confinement which the medic had been called to had proceeded normally and a girl baby had replaced the man who had checked out.

During his restless and often unescorted wanderings he came on groups of men lying sprawled out in the long, hot grass, on their sides or propped up on their elbows as they watched their instructor developing some aspect of the attack with the aid of diagrams tacked to a tree-trunk, and occasionally asking highly pertinent questions in deceptively casual tones. Or men suspended from high branches by a single

rope around their belts, swinging and twisting and sweating inside wickerwork shields while they shot their cross-bows at ridiculously small targets.

In weightless conditions spin would be set up by the reaction of any projectile-firing weapon, and this drill was to accustom the men to hitting targets which whirled and twisted around them. Their instructor would yell advice about shooting from waist-level to minimise spin, and often the men would miss their targets completely because they were incapacitated by laughter as much as dizziness.

Some of the men, the assault groups in particular, seemed to get a kick out of Warren's informal, unexpected visits, especially when he joined in their drills. With others his activities simply made them uncomfortable, but for many weeks he had felt an increasing need to reassure himself that his plan was going well, that he was doing the right thing and that the Committeemen would still follow him. Like some latter-day Haroun al Raschid he wandered his kingdom in an attempt to discover what his people were really thinking. When he found that often they did not think the way he wanted them to, Warren lost his temper to such an extent that his show of democratic good-fellowship must at times have seemed like sheerest hypocrisy.

But everyone laughed or lost their temper or lashed out too easily these days. E-Day was rushing down on them now, and tension had become a major constituent of the air they breathed. By Minus Twenty-three the domesticated battlers had been dispersed to the neighbourhood of the two mountain workshops, where singly or in small groups they would practise with dummy loads along the routes they would use on E-Day. The gradual build-up of shipping in the bay, no longer concealed, so as to suggest to the guardship that the POWs were settling down to a programme of exploration and expansion, was sufficient to evacuate essential records and personnel. The long-range communications system had been tested and the weather forecasters were guardedly optimistic.

Warren's own feelings closely resembled those of his meteorologists, until on E-minus Twenty-one a glider coming in to land on the bay discovered the second major act of sabotage.

To be concluded

postmortem

readers' opinions and comment

Dear Mr. Carnell,

I've been an s-f addict since 1930, when I spent 3d. of my pocket money (all week's supply) on an issue of *Amazing Stories* featuring some bug-eyed monsters on the cover and the first adventure of Wade, Morey and Arcott by J. Campbell inside. I was 12 at the time and by the time war broke out and I joined the RAF, I'd backtracked to 1926 and had complete files of *Amazing*, *Astounding*, *Thrilling Wonder*, *Air Wonder*, the quarterlies (I never found the *Amazing Annual*)—the lot went west in the war—pause for tears !

I've read *New Worlds Science Fiction* since No. 4 and the collecting bug is still with me, but more from habit by now, and as an habituee (is it "a" or "an"?) I've followed your series of editorials by guests with interest and with growing disbelief. Do they really believe the guff they write about s-f having a purpose, an art form ? Let's be honest—the purpose of the s-f author is to earn money by writing, the aim of the reader is to be entertained. All leisure reading is escapist and succeeds only by reader identification with characters, or by reader identification with author i.e. where the reader can either outwit the author (as in a crime or western by guessing the outcome) or attempt to realise what the author is trying to moralize about and go along with him.

The hackneyed "Sense of Wonder" should really be rephrased, in my opinion, "sense of wondering" (I apologise for writing with a sprained wrist—pen tends to go out of control) because it is my sense of wondering about the future which makes me go on reading s-f. Any author who constructs a story which entertains me with intelligent guesswork, or with a credible set of characters in a situation unlikely to have yet occurred, is an s-f author to me, irrespective of whether his scientific extrapolations are accurate or not. Purpose—entertainment : artform—hooey ! Too often, the s-f author with delusions of grandeur produces a story which is unintelligible. He is so keen on convincing the reader that it's *LITERATURE*

that's being read or a vast scientific truth propounded that the entertainment content is reduced to nil.

So my advice to your authors is—forget your “messages,” write a story and if you're competent enough workmen, you'll entertain us, your readers, which should be your purpose !

Frank Michaels,

Papatoetoe, New Zealand.

Dear Sir,

Hardly a month passes without a mention in at least one of your excellent magazines of your hope for re-introducing a “sense of wonder” into s-f stories. You also seem to be conducting an extensive, albeit lukewarm campaign to rid s-f of pseudo-science e.g. hyper-f.t.l.-super-under-overdrives, Mk IV positron hypawave blasters etc., and I for one am all for this cleaning up process.

It does seem, however, that you are at times leaning too far the other way. John Ashcroft's editorial cited Russell's “Wasp” as being just as easily set in Nazi Germany. By the same token “End-Game” could have taken place in Russia or any of the totalitarian states.

“Dawn's Left Hand,” while being excellently written and handled, lost almost all of its s-f attributes after Part I.

At this point I would hasten to add that even the masters can fall into this trap. Even Asimov's “detective s-f” becomes somewhat a la Perry Mason, and you find yourself wondering why the author has complicated such an enthralling crime story with humanoid robots, paranoid spacers etc. (The denouements of these stories are somewhat monotonous, just like the ending of “The Case of the Over-Sexed Secretary” etc. ad nauseam, when someone totally unexpected is denounced as the killer of the oil magnate/millionaire/girl-chasing/clean-wholesome all American saint-type).

The true s-f stories are those which deal in abstract concepts. The abstractness, however, is not caused by lack of possibility or probability, but by lack of human experience. Stories dealing with the reactions of men to *totally alien* environments, and to situations brought about by as yet unexperienced outside interference (e.g. aliens), or hitherto unattained technological advancement are the only ones which could be classed as true s-f. I am sorry to say that these conditions are not fulfilled by murders, impersonations e.g. “Dawn's Left Hand”

or even Heinlein's "Double Star," and the last days of condemned criminals.

By all means eliminate the twelve-tentacled, blaster wielding, TK, PSI, E.S.P., ten-foot maniacs from Aldebaran IX but let's have s-f and not f-s.

Harold Mead,
Bonnington Hotel, W.C.1.

Dear Mr. Carnell,

In a recent letter to myself you state that *New Worlds* is in an interim period with the new writers feeling their way around. However, some of the recent stories in *New Worlds* have been of a higher literary standard than ever before ("The Last Salamander," "Flux" and the serials) even if some of the plots are a bit time-worn. My vote for the best *New Worlds* story of 1963 would go unhesitatingly to J. G. Ballard's "Subliminal Man" in the January issue.

It was a sad day for me when *Science Fiction Adventures* folded last summer. Its sudden death left a gap in the British publishing field that will be hard to fill with the two remaining magazines. Many of the stories, had they been written twenty years ago, would now be considered 'classics.' "The Sundered Worlds" series, the "Scarlet Denial" series, the whole of issue 24 (no credits for "The Drowned World" anywhere) "A Trek to Na-Abiza" (one of the best stories published in any of your magazines, except for the strange coincidence that 'No' should be translated as 'Na' on an alien world). Then there was "Wind of Liberty," "Earth's Long Shadow" and "Of Earth Foretold" by Bulmer, and "Occupation Warrior" by White.

I am sure that if you gave *Science Fiction Adventures* a new title (I am sure that its terrible name was one of the main reasons for the drop in sales) and stopped calling it an 'adventure' magazine, it would sell.

I would like to see the return of your 'Nova' novels, if this is possible, and how about some 'Best From New Worlds' anthologies? A vast number of people buy s-f paperbacks but would not look at a magazine.

I heartily approve of the *New Worlds* cover layout. Once again you lead the field, as you did with dropping two columns of print, and interior illustrations. Does anybody actually sit and look at those illustrations? Some of your cover illustra-

tions were ghastly. The semi-pornographic covers on Nos. 106 and 107 for example.

I am not so sure about the title page. Once I get used to it, probably, but I always thought that the original crest was very smart. The lower case lettering takes some getting used to too, but I am beginning to like it. It seems to fit a science fiction magazine. At least you take trouble over the appearance of the magazine, which is more than can be said for certain magazines

I have been thinking gloomy thoughts regarding the plight of science fiction today, and I have come to the conclusion that the readership will never be very great, as it takes just as much effort to read science fiction properly as it does to write it. Anyone can enjoy a detective story or a James Bond thriller, but it takes a specific type of mind to read s-f. The s-f reader must have a flexible mind, be intelligent, and be forward looking. Reactionary types do not read s-f. I am lucky enough to be blessed with these qualities, but, unfortunately, I also have an irrepressible desire to collect things, a dangerous combination leading inevitably to broken homes and overdrafts. However, I have been lucky enough to dig up some very interesting items, *New Worlds* Nos. 4 and 5, *Science Fantasy* Nos. 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 and a fascinating out-of-print volume entitled "Vampires and Vampirism" by Dudley Wright. It deals with the subject exhaustively and is admirable as a work of reference.

How about publishing a list of the Hugo winners at the World Conventions. It is very hard to find them out.

Talking of Hugo's, what on Earth (or in space) is going to be considered top novel for '63? Unless there has been something published in the States, there was not a decent novel published throughout the whole year.

Finally, can't you persuade someone to start a competitor to Nova Publications? I know it is not easy, but it has been done before. Competition is one of the best ways to improve a magazine.

D. J. Orme,
East Dulwich, London.

Dear Editor,

I have always felt that the above title was a rather morbid one for a letter column, however it now assumes a certain grim topicality in view of impending events. The main purpose of this epistle is to comment on "The Dark Mind" by Colin Kapp

and the long novella from *Science Fantasy*, "Skeleton Crew," by Brian W. Aldiss.

Colin Kapp has in the past shown us that he has talent (although his output has been surprisingly small) and his last novelette, "Lambda One" (N.W. 125) did much to reinforce this opinion. It is therefore with some reluctance that I must conclude that his serial "The Dark Mind" was a failure and something of a bad one at that. After I had finished reading the serial, I was flicking back through my recent *New Worlds* when I chanced upon the Literary Line-up in the September issue and I saw your comments on "The Dark Mind" and a mention of *The Stars My Destination*, Alfred Bester's great novel. Then I saw what I had been feeling, that Dalroi reminded me of someone else—"Gully Foyle." Using concepts set out in "Lambda One," he had told a story of revenge similar to *The Stars My Destination*. Now a quest for vengeance isn't the most original plot-line but it is reasonable enough if the reader is sufficiently in tune with the emotions of the man seeking revenge. Gully Foyle can be sympathised with all (or almost) all the time—Dalroi hardly ever. The concepts of good and evil may be poor philosophy but they are excellent for involving the reader in the plot of a book, that is perhaps one of the oldest maxims for an author. Dalroi is hardly ever seen as a human being and his reasons for opposing Failway pitifully inadequate, not because objectively they are, but because they are not used enough . . . Dalroi also breaks a basic rule of any "superman" story in that his powers are undefined except that he cannot be killed or "stopped"; what is the point of any story where the hero cannot be thwarted? The basis of any conflict must be that the contestants have limitations or the interest evaporates. Dalroi jumps from the fire into the frying pan (all situations have a resemblance to one another despite the author's ingenuity in creating new perils) so often that the reader is mentally exhausted just following the situation. But there is so much confusion due to a profusion of villains, murders, etc., that the reader has hardly any chance to see any reason or indeed the main lines of the plot even. You cannot make people feel the power of emotions just by writing HATE in big enough capitals, there has to be some sort of build up. This strange hybrid mixture of Van Vogt and Bester has too small a plotline until the denouement and lacks a sufficiently human hero. The novel has its good points, Failway is an interesting institution, the transinfinite is well described and the

ending cleverly ties up most of the loose ends. Sorry, but as Bradbury was quoted as saying of *Forbidden Planet*, "who's got the plot?"

"Skeleton Crew" was another failure to my unsophisticated mind. The plot itself has little enough in it (especially when compared with "The Dark Mind"). The civilisation of the future was described in barest outline but it differs in little from many other harsh (if unlikely) futures that Science Fictioneers have contrived. The ending is possibly the weakest and tritest Aldiss has ever written and on these grounds is a poor novelette. On the other hand, Knowle is well portrayed as a sick and confused figure who is swept along by others.

Both Aldiss and Kapp have done and can do better . . . as far as the covers of recent Nova magazines go, I'm afraid the less said the better. The cover is an important selling point of any magazine and I am not convinced that these one colour things are any better than Brian Lewis's or Quinn's illustrations. It may be a little late to send in constructive criticism but there you have it. Nova, and indeed all magazines, have been drifting from the magazine-with-features toward the paperback collection with none and they are still losing ground.

Terence Bull,
Northampton.

An Index To The WEIRD FICTION MAGAZINES

(Part 1 — Index by Title)

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book reviews

by leslie flood

british—hardcover

It is surprising that Russia, with its massive contribution to astronautics and other sciences and its great tradition of literature, should have produced so little science fiction, and is only now making great strides in this direction. That this is so, and also that even under Czarism and pre-Stalin Soviets the heavy hand of Orthodox ideology did not completely shut out Russian writers from the freedom of thought necessary for scientific speculation, is shown by Robert Magidoff, editor of **Russian Science Fiction** (Allen and Unwin, 25/-). This compilation of a short history of Russian s-f, potted biographies of its writers, and selections from both old and contemporary styles of writing, is a must for the serious student and/or collector, and of more than passing interest to the general reader. Overall style is reminiscent of the straightforward melodramatics of space travel adventures found in the '30's in the early pulp magazines; Yefremov, for instance, is heavily influenced by the early John W. Campbell stories, and by Murray Leinster whose "First Contact" is severely criticised on doctrinaire grounds in a very similar story called "Cor Serpentis."

All the authors here toe the socialistic line, and the characterisation, like the propaganda, is greatly emotional rather than subtle, but even allowing for some naivete, self-congratulation of scientific achievement, and perhaps some unevenness in translation (albeit a very creditable job by Doris Johnson) there remains a great deal of entertaining material, particularly from the most well-known author Yefremov, whose other story "Shadows of the Past" has surprising atmosphere, and a short story gem, "The Astronaut," by a young lady Valentina Zhuraleva in which she rivals her Christian-name-sake of factual space travel, in evidence of the new humanism in Soviet science fiction.

Edmund Cooper translates that tired old cliché of science fiction—where a handful of humans of both sexes are transported to an unknown planetary Eden for some alien experiment—into quite an absorbing new novel, **Transit** (Faber and Faber, 18/-), by virtue of realistic characterisation and excellent writing. Aided, of course, by that never failing magnet of the puzzle's final solution. Such a hoary plot, with its inevitable moralising, incredible mechanics and pitfalls of implausibility, needs the kind of treatment that Mr. Cooper gives it in order to succeed in the slightest degree, and I am happy to say that this one is better than average.

Clifford Simak obliges with a similar piece of wish-fulfilment in **Way Station** (Victor Gollancz Ltd., 16/-) wherein a representative of Earth competes successfully with the super-beings of the galaxy by the simple virtue of humanity. Well, it's very difficult to be cynical when faced with Mr. Simak's homespun philosophy and evocation of that good old sense of wonder, although the plot's implausibility is more hard to conceal; an ever-youthful Civil War veteran was recruited a century ago by an alien to be the operator of a matter-transporter, a kind of galactic relay-station for transients, and is now being investigated by the F.B.I. at a crucial moment in the destiny of Earth in relation to its acceptance into the universal council. This is the kind of nonsense I simply cannot resist, and Simak does it so well. Thoroughly enjoyable.

The current Gollancz S-F Choice actually reprints from a paper-back, but far from being reprehensible, this action makes available once again one of the post-war classics, for too long out of print, the third Frederik Pohl/C. M. Kornbluth collaboration **Gladiator-At-Law** (Gollancz, 15/-). Brilliantly visualised, as usual, this possible American future with its feudal system of huge legalistic and monopolistic businesses owning contract-leased homes, brutal gladiatorial spectacles for the masses (the fodder for which comes from the lawless suburbs of the noncontracted, like the infamous Belly Rave of the story) is harshly drawn and completely lacks the spurious charm of say, *The Space Merchants*. But the very urgency of the action, the David/Goliath stock-battle, involving as motley a collection of characters as ever emerged from the pages of *Galaxy* magazine, its plot complexities, its very amorality, and its slick, tautly-written brittleness, makes for very compulsive reading.

leslie flood

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